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DAVID WOHL
GIUSEPPE CAFARO
VIVES HARTMAN
JOSH REED

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss





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VOLUME ONE
CHAPTER ONE OF FOUR

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss

"The Gift"

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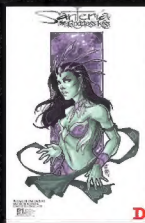
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MANY YEARS AGO, THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY, THE CHILDREN OF OONAA KNEW THEIR GODDESS BY NAME.

AND THROUGH HER CHOSEN PRIESTESS, AAMALI, OONAA CALLED UPON HER DISCIPLES TO EXPRESS THEIR LOVE WITH GIFTS OF SONG AND DANCE, THEIR INSTRUMENTS AND THEIR BODIES, ALL UNITED IN DELIRIOUS, BOUNDLESS CELEBRATION.

THIS GIFT WAS OONAA'S SUSTENANCE AND THE DERIVATION OF HER POWER; WHICH SHE RECIPROCATED BY PROVIDING A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST AND AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF MEAT FROM THE HUNT FOR HER DEVOTED CHILDREN.

OONAA'S WORSHIPERS WERE WITHOUT NEED NOR FEAR. FOR IN THIS PLACE, AT THIS TIME, THE GODDESS WAS WITHOUT PEER...

...UNTIL THEY CAME.

THEY ARRIVED FROM THE NORTH WITH THEIR SHIPS AND SOLDIERS-- AND THEIR OWN FORM OF WORSHIP OF THE "ONE TRUE GOD" THAT, THE PRAGMATIC ELDERS DECIDED (AFTER MUCH GOLD WAS OFFERED), SHOULD BE THEIR TRIBE'S BELIEF AS WELL.

SUDDENLY, OONAA WAS MERELY A REMNANT OF THE PAST, HER FOLLOWERS, IGNORANT AND SUPERSTITIOUS. UNCIVILIZED. EXPENDABLE.

NO BETTER THAN LIVESTOCK, THEY WERE MERELY PROPERTY TO BE OWNED...OR SOLD.

AND THUS, THE ONCE-PROUD CHILDREN OF OONAA WERE FORCEFULLY TAKEN FROM THEIR HOMES, AAMALI'S TERRIFIED, YOUNG SON AMONG THEM...

...IMPRISONED BELOW THE DECK OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS OF VESSELS, THE SLAVER SHIP, ON A TUMULTUOUS, MONTH-LONG JOURNEY REPLETE WITH PAIN AND DEGRADATION.

AS THE HAND-PICKED SERVANT TO THE OFFICERS ON THIS VOYAGE, AAMALI, WHILE STILL A SLAVE (ALBEIT OFTEN AN UNFETTERED ONE), DIDN'T SEEM TO ENDURE A VOYAGE AS HARSH AS THAT OF HER COUNTERPARTS.

BUT SHE WOULD'VE EXCHANGED PLACES WITH ANY ONE OF THEM WITHOUT A MOMENT'S HESITATION, NEARLY DRIVEN MAD FROM THE CHARNEL STENCH AND THE ENDLESS CRIES OF TORMENT AND DESPAIR, PAIN AND DEATH.

BUT WORST OF ALL, HEARING THOSE SOUNDS FROM HER OWN SON WAS THE MOST EXCRUCIATING. THERE WAS NO PUNISHMENT, NOR HUMILIATION, SHE COULD ENDURE THAT COULD EVER MATCH THAT SOUL-SEARING PAIN. YET, SHE KNEW, WITHOUT DOUBT, OONAA WAS WITH HER.

AND ALTHOUGH THE "FORMER" PRIESTESS AAMALI CLAIMED TO ACCEPT THE SO-CALLED "WORD OF THE LORD," SHE IMPLORED OONAA NIGHTLY FOR AID AND GUIDANCE IN KEEPING HER CHILD AND HER PEOPLE SAFE. NEVER HERSELF.

OONAA NEVER SPOKE, BUT THE GODDESS INDEED RESPONDED IN A MOST UNEXPECTED WAY, ENACTING VENGEANCE ON THE EUROPEAN PIG WHO DISRESPECTED HER PRIESTESS.

WORD QUICKLY SPREAD THROUGH THE SHIP THAT A WITCH HAD KILLED AN OFFICER MERELY FOR TOUCHING HER, SO THEY MUST TREAT THEIR CARGO BETTER, LEST THE WITCH SINK THE SHIP IN ANGER.

NOW SEEING THAT THE GODDESS WAS STILL WITH THEM, ALBEIT SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISHED IN POWER, AAMALI UNDERSTOOD WHAT HER TASK WOULD BE UPON ARRIVAL.

STILL OONAA'S PRIESTESS, SHE WOULD BRING WORSHIPERS, OLD AND NEW, INTO THE FOLD SO THAT THEY COULD REINVIGORATE THE GODDESS IN THIS STRANGE, NEW LAND CALLED CUBA.

A DIFFICULT TASK, PERHAPS, IN A PLACE WHERE EVEN THE PEOPLE OF COLOR HAD ADOPTED THE RELIGION OF THE OPPRESSOR.



BUT WHEN SHE WAS CHOSEN TO WORK IN THE MASTER'S HOUSE, TAKING CARE OF HIS CHILDREN, SHE KNEW WHAT THE GODDESS WOULD HAVE OF HER.

AAMALI COULD TELL BY THE LASCIVIOUS LOOKS SHE RECEIVED FROM HER MASTER THAT IT WOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE THIS SUPPOSEDLY DEVOUT CATHOLIC SNEAKED AWAY FROM HIS MARITAL BED AND ARRIVED IN THE HOUSE-SLAVES' QUARTERS.



ONE NIGHT, LESS THAN A MONTH AFTER HER ARRIVAL, HE APPROACHED. HE DIDN'T SAY A WORD AS HE VIOLENTLY TOOK HER.

NOR DID SHE.



Noooooo!!!

THE GODDESS' RETRIBUTION WAS SWIFT BUT DEFINITELY NOT PAINLESS.



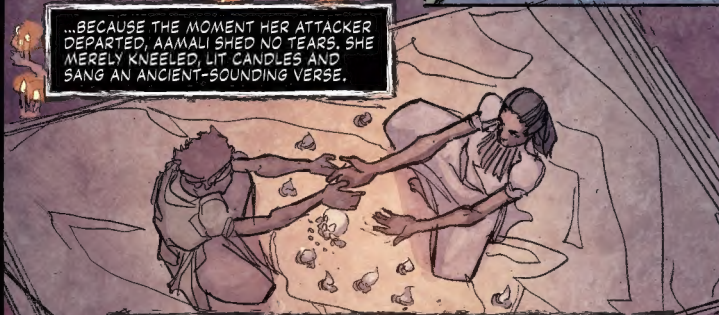
SOMEBODY HELP--PLEASE!? OH, GOD, PLEASE!!!

THE DOCTOR CLAIMED IT MUST'VE BEEN AN UNKNOWN VENEREAL DISEASE FROM AFRICA. HIS MISTRESS SAID THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE BUT HER EYES TOLD THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER.



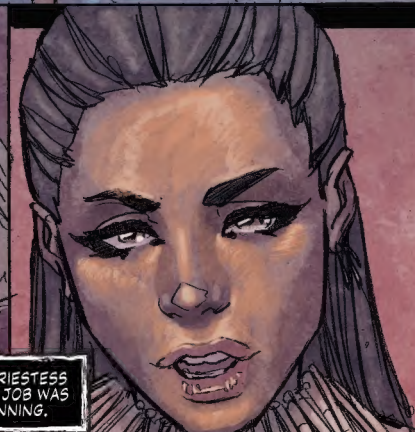
ALL OF THE WOMEN WHO SHARED THE SLAVE QUARTERS WITH THE PRIESTESS BELIEVED THERE WAS A VERY DIFFERENT REASON FOR THE MASTER'S AILMENT...

...BECAUSE THE MOMENT HER ATTACKER DEPARTED, AAMALI SHED NO TEARS. SHE MERELY KNEELED, LIT CANDLES AND SANG AN ANCIENT-SOUNDING VERSE.

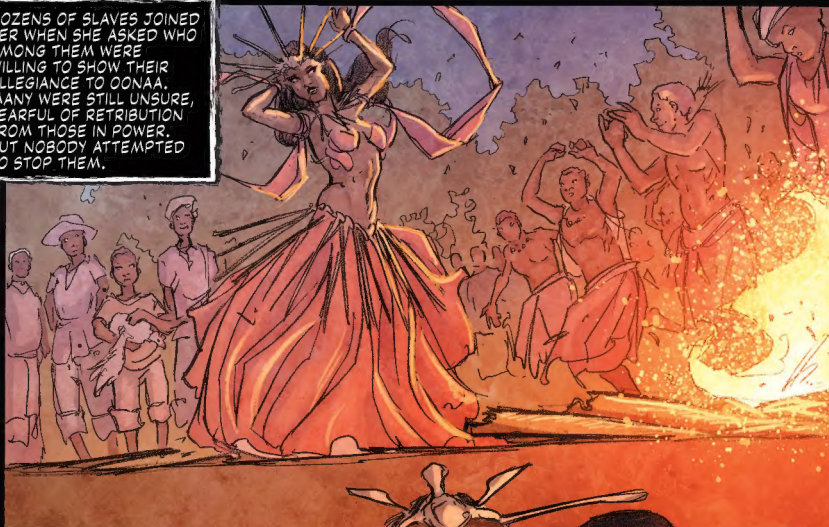


AND BY THE NEXT DAY, EVERYONE KNEW OF QONAA, THE PROTECTOR OF SLAVES, AND HER PRIESTESS WHO SPOKE TO THE GODDESS. SOME EVEN CAME TO AAMALI WITH REQUESTS OF THEIR OWN.

BUT THE PRIESTESS KNEW HER JOB WAS JUST BEGINNING.



DOZENS OF SLAVES JOINED HER WHEN SHE ASKED WHO AMONG THEM WERE WILLING TO SHOW THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO OONAA. MANY WERE STILL UNSURE, FEARFUL OF RETRIBUTION FROM THOSE IN POWER, BUT NOBODY ATTEMPTED TO STOP THEM.



IN THIS NEW LAND BUILT ON WAR AND CONQUEST...



...OONAA NEEDED MORE FROM HER WORSHIPERS, SO THAT SHE COULD BECOME EVEN MORE POWERFUL IN THIS HOSTILE LAND.

OONAA NEEDED BLOOD.



AND BLOOD SHE RECEIVED.



AND NOW, NEARLY 300 YEARS LATER, THE GODDESS STILL THRIVES.



AND STILL SHE THIRSTS.



WHMMP



AS DO I.



FOR THE GODDESS MUST
ENDURE WHILE HER WORK
REMAINS UNFINISHED.

SHE HAS ACCEPTED THE OFFERING,
AND NOW PRESENTS HER GIFT TO
HER MOST FAITHFUL SERVANT...

...IN THE FORM OF THIS
BOY, ERICK RAYMUNDEZ,
WHO, MERE MONTHS AGO,
WAS ON THE BRINK OF
DEATH AFTER FALLING
VICTIM TO LEUKEMIA.

HIS MOTHER CLARISSA, ALREADY A WIDOW, REFUSED TO
BELIEVE THE ONCOLOGIST'S DIAGNOSIS THAT THE BOY'S
YOUNG AGE HAD ENABLED THE CANCER TO GROW AT SUCH
A RAPID RATE THAT HE WAS, SADLY, ONLY MONTHS AWAY
FROM LOSING HIS LIFE TO THE RAVAGES OF THE DISEASE.

THE DOCTOR
SAID THE
MERCIFUL
ROUTE WOULD
BE TO LET HER
CHILD DIE.

A DEVOUT
CATHOLIC, SHE
SLAPPED THE
DOCTOR, WIPED
AN ANGRY TEAR
FROM HER EYE,
TOOK HER SON'S
CLAMMY, FEVERED
HAND IN HER'S,
AND LEFT THE
HOSPITAL.

SHE KNEW IN HER HEART THAT JESUS
CHRIST WOULD NOT TAKE HER ONLY
SON AWAY FROM HER, NOT AFTER
ALL THEY'D ALREADY ENDURED.

ERICKSITO,
DINNER WILL BE
READY IN TWENTY
MINUTES SO DON'T
BE LONG.

OH,
AND COULD YOU
PICK UP
SOME CAFE
BUSTELO?

ERICK?
DID YOU
HEAR ME?

IN STUNNED AMAZEMENT, SHE
STOPPED IN FRONT OF A WINDOW
FILLED WITH PAINTINGS, STATUES AND
DOZENS OF OTHER REPRESENTATIONS
OF JESUS AND ALL OF HIS SAINTS
AND ANGELS.

SHE DIDN'T NOTICE
SOME OF THE
SAINTS AND ANGELS
HAD VERY EXOTIC-
SOUNDING NAMES.

THE MOMENT SHE
WALKED IN THE DOOR,
THE KINDLY OLD MAN
BEHIND THE COUNTER
INTRODUCED HIMSELF
AS TIO FERNANDO
VELEZ AND, SEEING
HER FORLORN FACE...

...HE STEPPED AROUND THE COUNTER,
WRAPPING HIS ARMS AROUND HER,
SAYING EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT.

BEFORE SHE'D EVEN
GIVEN THOUGHT TO
WHAT WAS HAPPENING,
TIO FERNANDO
RETURNED HOME
WITH HER, TO PAY A
VISIT TO THE NOW
BED-RIDDEN ERICK.

KNEELING, HE TOLD ERICK THAT
AN ANGEL HAD GIVEN HIM THE
POWER TO HEAL, AND TOLD HIM
SHE WANTED THE BOY TO
RECEIVE HER GIFT AS HE LAID
HIS HANDS ON ERICK'S HEART.

SUDDENLY, ILLUMINATION
POURED FROM FERNANDO'S
HANDS, FILLING ERICK'S BODY
WITH WHAT CLARISSA CALLED
LATER, "A DIVINE LIGHT FROM
HEAVEN."

ERICK RECEIVED THE
GODDESS' KISS.

SPANISH HARLEM. NOW.

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? **THREE PINTS** OF CHERRY GARCIA A DAY. AT THIS RATE, I SHOULD BUY STOCK IN BEN AND GODDAMMED JERRY'S!

JUST LISTEN TO MARTHA AND REMEMBER TO PICK IT UP BEFORE YOU GET HOME. YOU DON'T WANNA GET IN THE WAY OF A PREGNANT LADY AND HER ICE CREAM, MICHAEL.

THAT MEANS NO TRIPS FOR A NIGHTCAP AFTER WORK. I CAN'T SAVE YOUR ASS TONIGHT. I NEED TO STUDY FOR FINALS.

YOU GOT IT, FUTURE DOCTOR NAOMI CLARKE.

THIS IS DISPATCH TO ANY VEHICLES IN THE VICINITY OF SECOND AVENUE AND 109TH STREET.

STOP BREAKING MY BALLS AND ANSWER THE GODDAMMED CALL.

BASE, THIS IS 261. IN VICINITY AND EN ROUTE.

ROGER THAT, 261. IT'S 1967 SECOND AVENUE, APARTMENT TWO BRAVO, MALE WITH SEVERE LACERATION OF EXTREMITY, FEMALE WITH POSSIBLE CONCUSSION.

LOVELY.

WEEEOOOOEEEOOOOEEEOOOO

NOT GETTIN' SQUEAMISH ON ME NOW, ARE YA, KID?

SOUNDS LIKE A CLASSIC "DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE" TO ME. AND IF IT IS, I LIKE IT BETTER WHEN THE COPS ARE ON SCENE FIRST.

AND STOP CALLING ME "KID." YOU SOUND LIKE ROBERT EVANS.

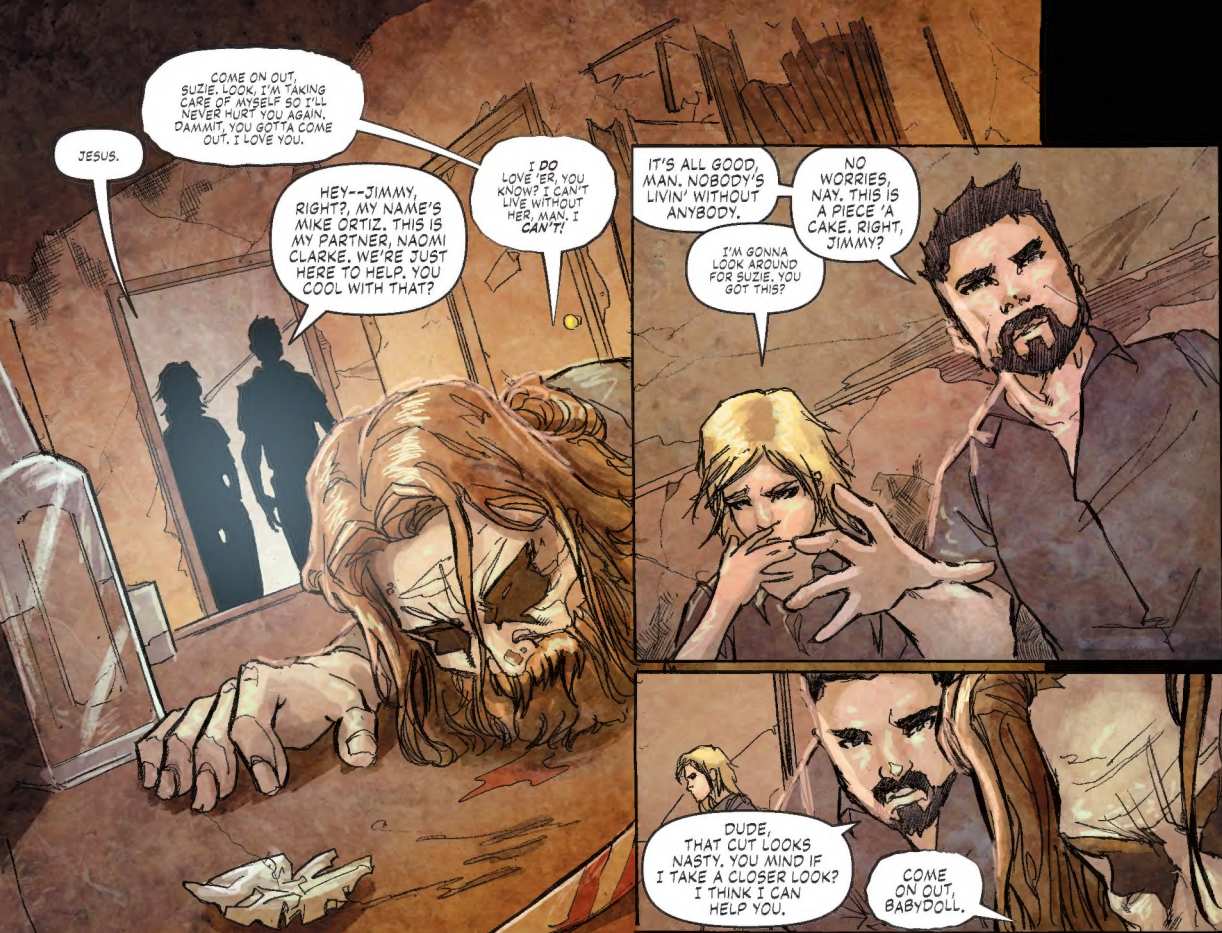
SCREEEEECH

JUST STAY BEHIND ME, KID. I'LL KEEP YOU SAFE.

GOD HELP ME.

HELLO? SOMEONE CALL EMERGENCY SERVICES?

SUZIE, YOU KNOW I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT. BUT WHEN YA RUN YOUR MOUTH OFF, I JUST CAN'T CONTROL MYSELF SOMETIMES, YA KNOW?



JESUS.

COME ON OUT, SUZIE. LOOK, I'M TAKING CARE OF MYSELF SO I'LL NEVER HURT YOU AGAIN. DAMNIT, YOU GOTTA COME OUT. I LOVE YOU.

HEY--JIMMY, RIGHT? MY NAME'S MIKE ORTIZ. THIS IS MY PARTNER, NAOMI CLARKE. WE'RE JUST HERE TO HELP. YOU COOL WITH THAT?

I DO LOVE 'ER, YOU KNOW? I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT HER, MAN, I CAN'T!

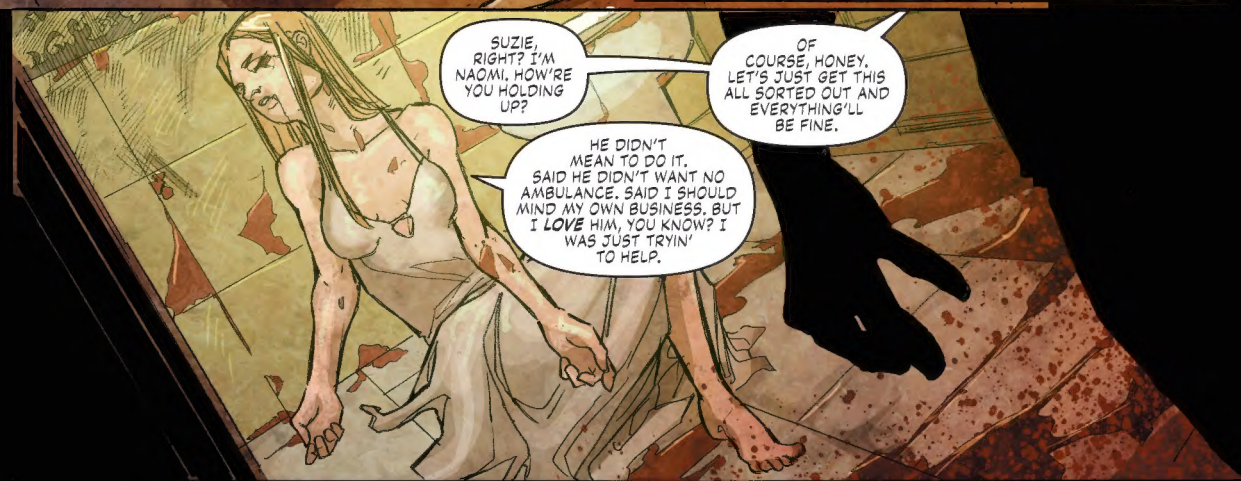
IT'S ALL GOOD, MAN. NOBODY'S LIVIN' WITHOUT ANYBODY.

I'M GONNA LOOK AROUND FOR SUZIE. YOU GOT THIS?

NO WORRIES, NAY. THIS IS A PIECE 'A CAKE, RIGHT, JIMMY?

DUDE, THAT CUT LOOKS NASTY. YOU MIND IF I TAKE A CLOSER LOOK? I THINK I CAN HELP YOU.

COME ON OUT, BABYDOLL.



SUZIE, RIGHT? I'M NAOMI. HOW'RE YOU HOLDING UP?

OF COURSE, HONEY. LET'S JUST GET THIS ALL SORTED OUT AND EVERYTHING'LL BE FINE.

HE DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT. SAID HE DIDN'T WANT NO AMBULANCE. SAID I SHOULD MIND MY OWN BUSINESS. BUT I LOVE HIM, YOU KNOW? I WAS JUST TRYIN' TO HELP.



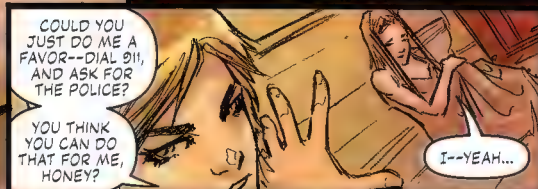
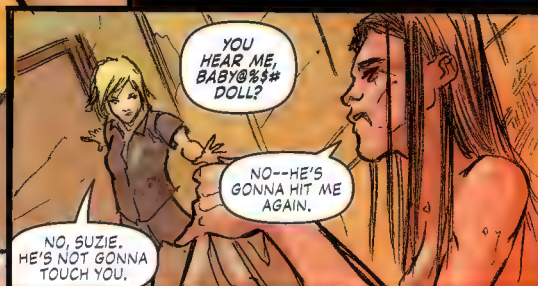
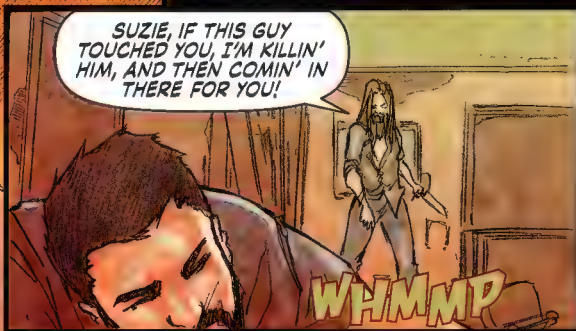
ALL RIGHT, JIMMY. I JUST NEED TO TRY TO STOP THE BLEEDING. THAT'S COOL, RIGHT?



SO, HAVING SOME PROBLEMS WITH THE LITTLE WOMAN? BELIEVE ME, I SYMPATHIZE. I GOT THIS WIFE AT HOME, MAN, SEVEN MONTHS PREGNANT. MUST'VE GAINED LIKE TWENTY POUN--

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MY GIRLFRIEND?

HNH?





STAY THERE--
I'LL KILL YOU AND MY
WHOOAAGGHHH!

THWAK



SONUVA...

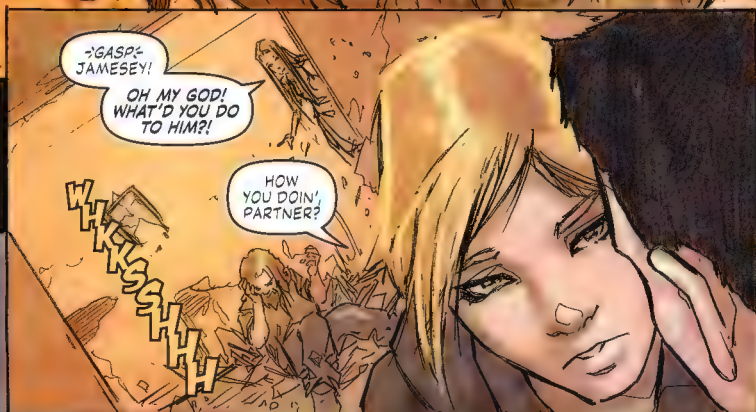


STAY
STILL, WILL
YA?

I THINK
IT'S TIME YOU
TOOK A NAP,
JIMMY.



KRAK

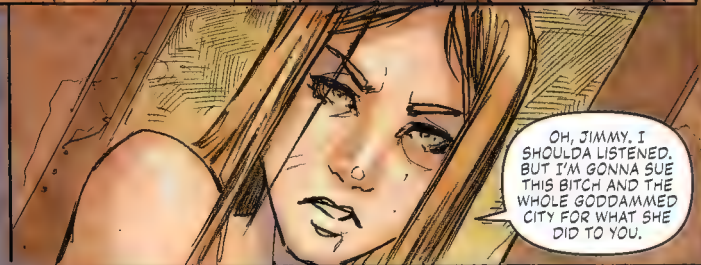


GASP
JAMESEY!

OH MY GOD!
WHAT'D YOU DO
TO HIM?!

HOW
YOU DOIN',
PARTNER?

WH
K
K
S
H
H
H



OH, JIMMY. I
SHOULDA LISTENED.
BUT I'M GONNA SUE
THIS BITCH AND THE
WHOLE GODDAMMED
CITY FOR WHAT SHE
DID TO YOU.



DID I
KNOCK HIM
OUT LIKE
THAT?

KIND OF.
I'LL TELL YOU
OUTSIDE. THIS PLACE
IS BEGINNING TO
STINK.

SEVERAL BLOCKS AWAY...

WHEN CLARISSA RAYMUNDEZ WALKED INTO THIS BOTANICA, SHE WAS SEEKING A MIRACLE.

AND WHEN SHE SAW COUNTLESS RENDITIONS OF HER LORD AND SAVIOR (AS WELL AS HIS ANGELS AND SAINTS) STARING BACK AT HER, SHE THOUGHT-- NO, SHE **KNEW**--HER PRAYERS HAD BEEN ANSWERED.

IF SHE'D HAVE LOOKED CLOSELY AT ALL THOSE SAINTS AND ANGELS, SHE MIGHT'VE NOTICED SOME THAT WERE NEVER SPOKEN ABOUT IN **HER** BIBLE.

BUT, DESPERATION USUALLY MAKES FOR POOR JUDGMENT. AND ALTHOUGH ERICK'S LEUKEMIA WAS, IN FACT, CURED, ALLOWING HIM TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE FOR NEARLY A FULL YEAR...

...THE TIME HAS COME FOR HIM TO SERVE HIS PURPOSE.

«ERICK? IS THAT YOU? SO GOOD TO SEE YOU, MY BOY! HOW IS MAMA CLARISSA? PLEASE SEND HER MY LO--»

YOU SEE, TIO FERNANDO, ERICK'S FIRSTWILE SAVIOR, HAS RECENTLY SHOWN A RELUCTANCE TO USE HIS MIRACULOUS ABILITY DUE TO A...CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE, SHALL WE SAY.

DOUBT, NOW FESTERS WITHIN HIM AS HE PONDER'S HIS "ANGEL'S" GIFT.

*TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH.

AND DOUBT IS SOMETHING NEITHER THE GODDESS NOR HER SERVANTS WILL ABIDE. NOT NOW, WHEN WE'RE SO CLOSE TO ACHIEVING OUR GOAL.

«WHAT TROUBLES YOU, ERICK? IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN DO TO HELP?»

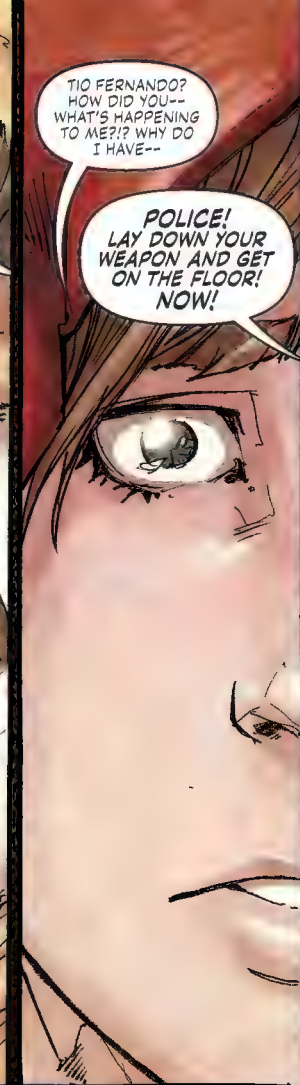
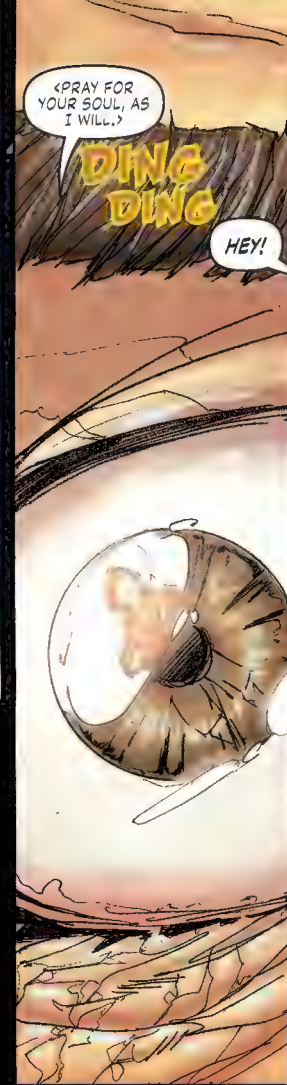
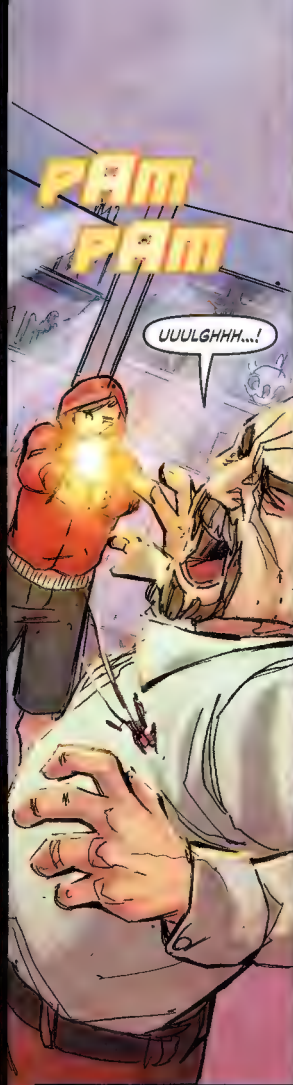
GASP

«ERICK, LISTEN TO ME, I KNOW YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THIS.»

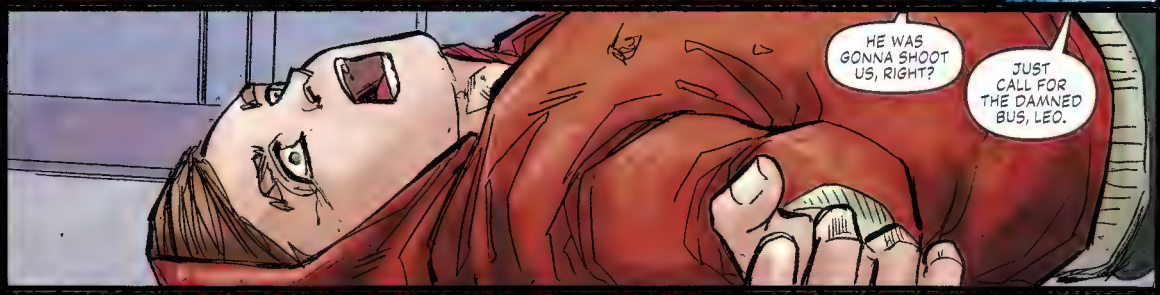
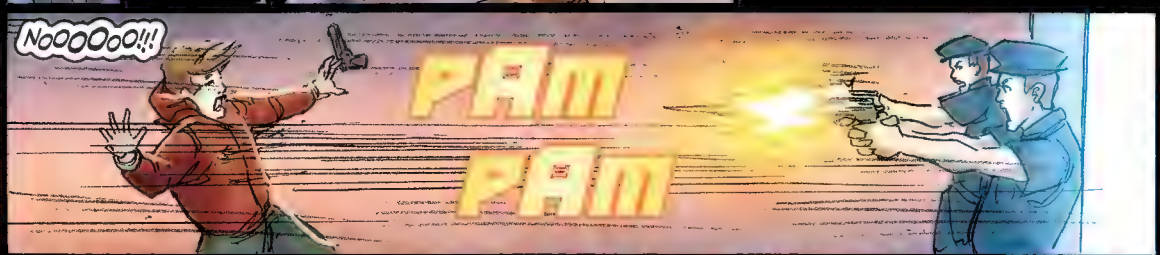
«ERICK, THIS IS NOT YOU. DON'T THROW YOUR LIFE AWAY AFTER WE FOUGHT SO HARD TO GET IT BA--»

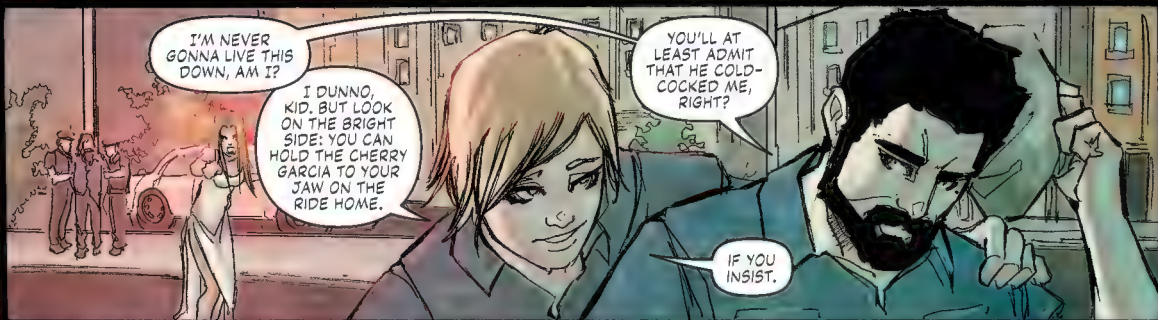
SO, TIO FERNANDO HAS BECOME EXPENDABLE.

PAM



POLICE!
LAY DOWN YOUR
WEAPON AND GET
ON THE FLOOR!
NOW!





I'M NEVER GONNA LIVE THIS DOWN, AM I?

I DUNNO, KID, BUT LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE: YOU CAN HOLD THE CHERRY GARCIA TO YOUR JAW ON THE RIDE HOME.

YOU'LL AT LEAST ADMIT THAT HE COLD-COCKED ME, RIGHT?

IF YOU INSIST.



HEY, WAIT A SECOND! YOU KNOW HE--

UNIT 261. PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE.

WHAT IS IT, HALLOWEEN, AND I DIDN'T GET THE MEMO? WHAT NOW?



THIS IS UNIT 261. OVER.

261, WE GOT A CALL FROM A UNI IN YOUR VICINITY.

TWO MEN DOWN AT THE SITE OF A POLICE SHOOTING ON THIRD AVENUE BETWEEN 111TH AND 112TH. ACKNOWLEDGE?

ROGER THAT, DISPATCH. 261 OUT.



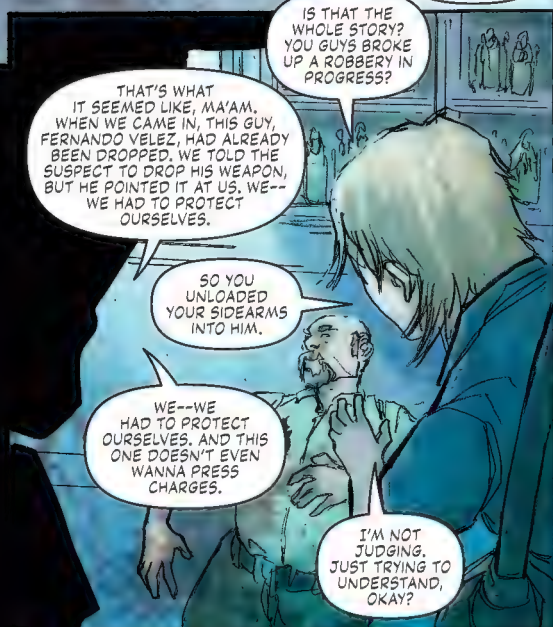
THANK GOD. THIS ONE'S BLEEDING FROM THE ABDOMEN. WE GOTTA GET 'IM TO A HOSPITAL.

AND THE OTHER?

HAS, UH, ABOUT TWO ROUNDS IN HIM. PULSE IS VERY WEAK. SERVES HIM RIGHT FOR TRYING TO ROB THE PLACE.

I'D FOCUS ON THE OLD GUY IF I WAS YOU. HE'S THE VIC HERE.

SORRY, DUDE. THAT AIN'T OUR CALL. GUILTY OR INNOCENT, WE HELP 'EM ALL.



IS THAT THE WHOLE STORY? YOU GUYS BROKE UP A ROBBERY IN PROGRESS?

THAT'S WHAT IT SEEMED LIKE, MA'AM. WHEN WE CAME IN, THIS GUY, FERNANDO VELEZ, HAD ALREADY BEEN DROPPED. WE TOLD THE SUSPECT TO DROP HIS WEAPON, BUT HE POINTED IT AT US. WE-- WE HAD TO PROTECT OURSELVES.

SO YOU UNLOADED YOUR SIDEARMS INTO HIM.

WE--WE HAD TO PROTECT OURSELVES. AND THIS ONE DOESN'T EVEN WANNA PRESS CHARGES.

I'M NOT JUDGING. JUST TRYING TO UNDERSTAND, OKAY?

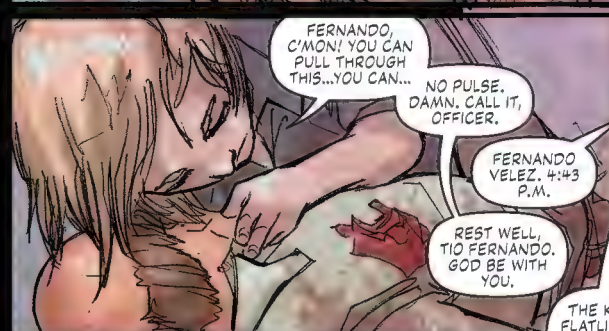
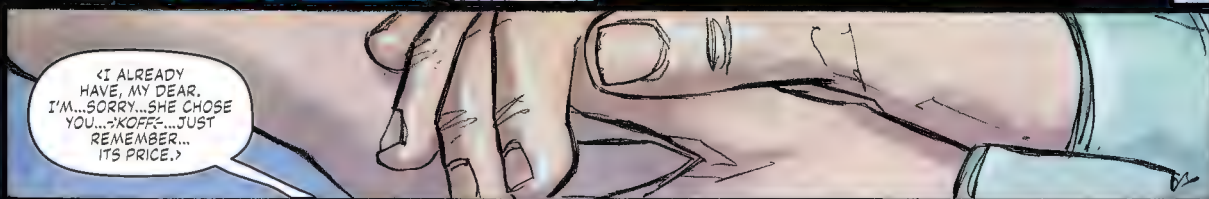
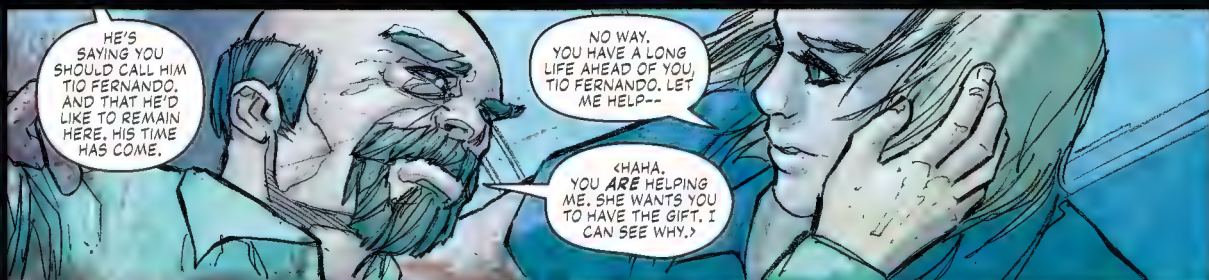


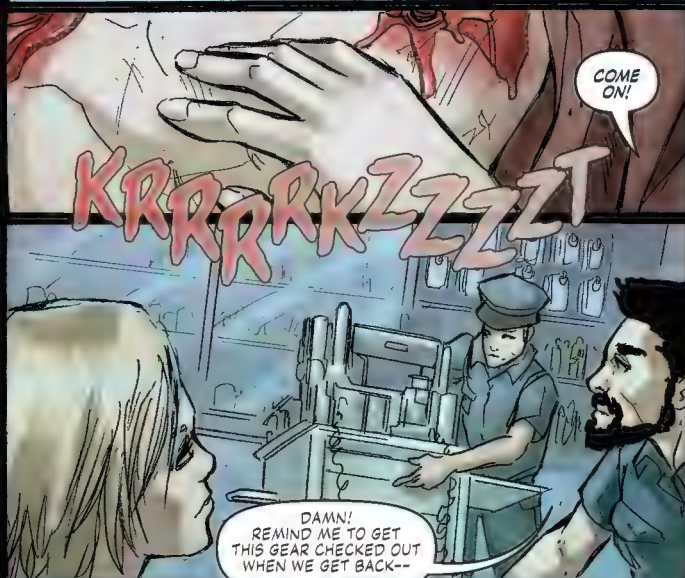
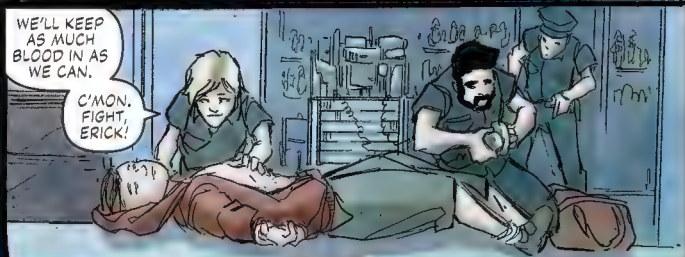
NOW, MISTER VELEZ. CAN YOU TELL ME HOW YOU'RE FEELING?

<SHE TOLD ME YOU WOULD COME...>

I'M SORRY, MY SPANISH IS A LITTLE RUSTY. HABLO INGLAIS? WE'RE GOING TO DO OUR BEST TO STABILIZE YOU, MISTER VELEZ, SO YOU CAN BE MOVED TO LENOX HILL HOSPITAL.

<YOU CAN CALL ME TIO FERNANDO, YOUNG LADY. BUT I MUST STAY, FOR MY TIME HAS COME...>





SEVERAL HOURS LATER. LENOX HILL HOSPITAL.

EXCUSE ME, BEAUTIFUL. I'M DETECTIVE WENDELL CHARLES AND THIS IS DETECTIVE VINCENT CHOE.

AND I SHOULD CARE BECAUSE...?

BECAUSE YOU, MY DEAR, ARE LOOKING AT YOUR FUTURE HUS--

PLEASE EXCUSE MY PARTNER. HE PLAYED FOOTBALL IN COLLEGE. NEVER BEEN THE SAME, LIKE THAT WILL SMITH MOVIE. WHAT HE MEANS IS, COULD YOU TELL US WHERE WE COULD FIND ERICK RAY--

519. THREE DOORS DOWN ON THE RIGHT.

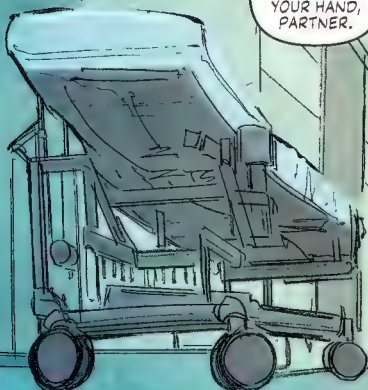
YOU ARE TOO KIND, MY DEAR. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO REPAY YOUR KINDNESS WITH--

GOOD NIGHT, WENDELL.

DID YOU HEAR THAT? SHE CALLED ME WENDELL!

YOU'RE BEING SARCASTIC. DON'T THINK I CAN'T TELL. I'M A DETECTIVE, YOU KNOW. WE CAN SENSE THESE THINGS.

YUP, YOU GOT HER IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND, PARTNER.



YEAH, YOU'D THINK A SMART GUY LIKE YOU WOULD KNOW HIS WIFE WOULD HAVE A PROB--

BEEP BEEP

--WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT? WE'RE HERE.

-KOFF- EXCUSE ME--MISSUS RAYMUNDEZ?

YES?

I KNOW THIS IS A DIFFICULT TIME, BUT WE'RE WITH THE NYPD AND WE JUST WANTED TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS. HOW IS ERICK?

WITH THE HELP OF OUR LORD HE'S GOING TO LIVE.

THE DOCTOR SAID IT'S A MIRACLE. THAT'S WHY MY BOY COULD NEVER HAVE SHOT POOR TIO FERNANDO.

BEEP BEEP

MISSUS RAYMUNDEZ, I AGREE WITH YOU 100 PERCENT. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN A GOOD KID.

BUT IS THERE A CHANCE SOMEONE FORCED HIM TO DO IT, MAYBE? THREATENED HIM?

NO. HE... -SNIFF-... LOVED TIO FERNANDO. THE MAN SAVED HIS LIFE!

REALLY. I HAD NO IDEA. COULD YOU TELL--

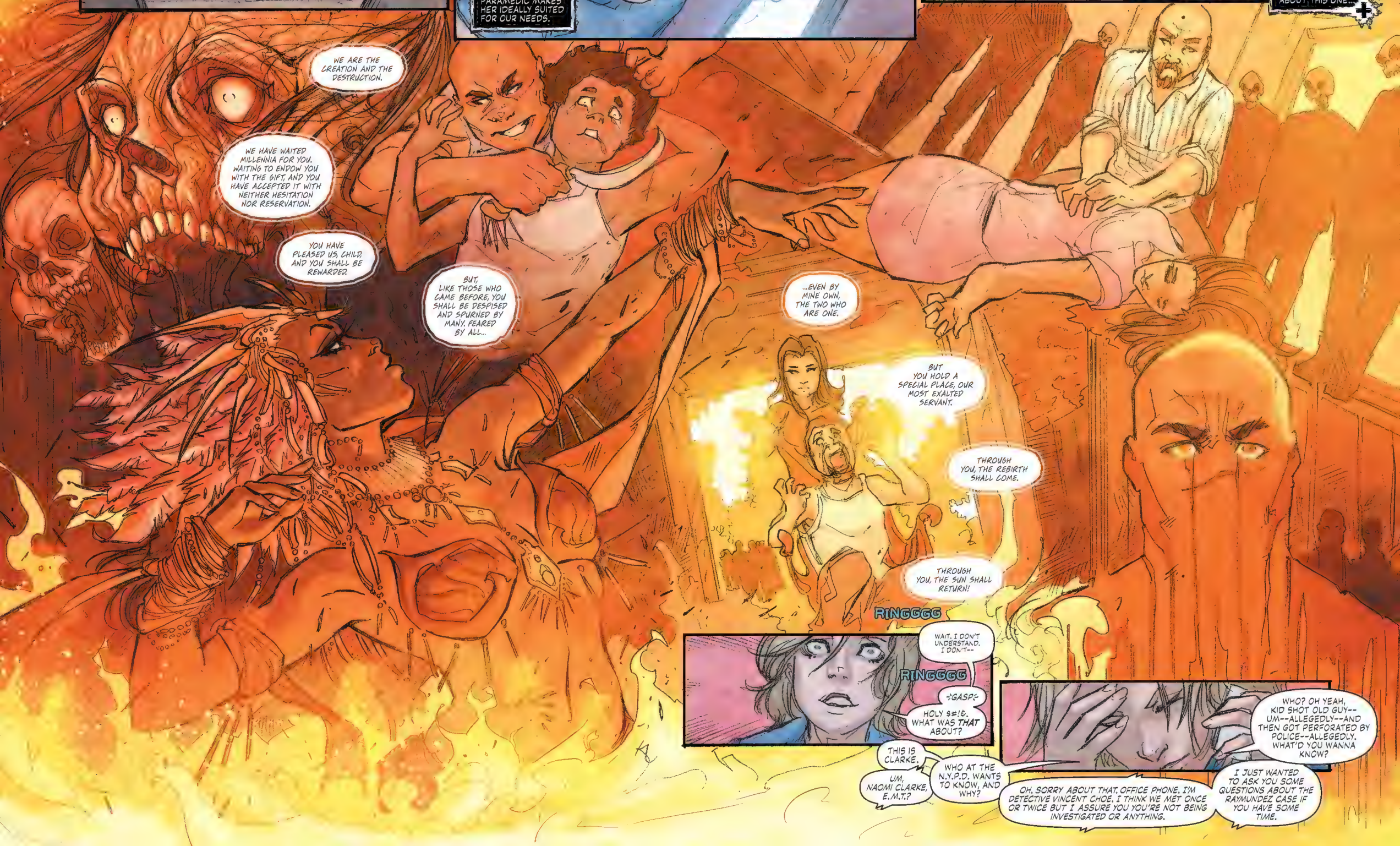
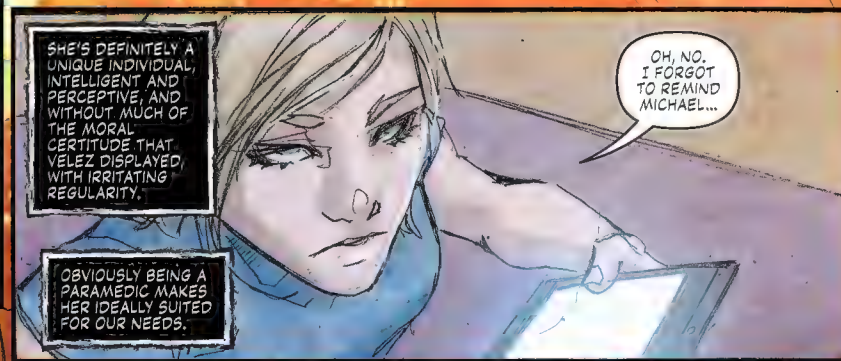
BEEP BEEP

TH--THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME, MISSUS RAYMUNDEZ. WE'LL LEAVE YOU WITH YOUR SON AND CLEAR THIS ALL UP LATER.

I'M SURE THIS IS JUST A BIG MISUNDERSTANDING.

BEEP BEEP

GOD BLESS YOU BOTH, DETECTIVES. I HOPE YOU FIND THE CULPRIT. TIO FERNANDO WAS A SAINT AND ANYONE WHO WOULD HARM HIM OR MY SON DESERVES TO BE PUNISHED.



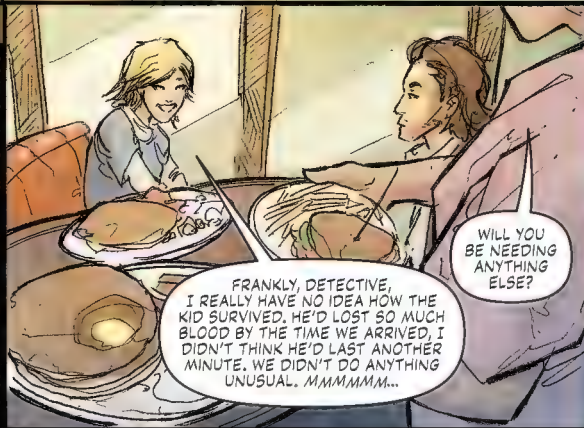
90 MINUTES LATER...

THE KID MUST'VE BEEN INTOXICATED BECAUSE WHEN THE UNIFORMS TOLD HIM TO DROP HIS WEAPON, HE JUST TURNED TOWARD THEM, WEAPON AND ALL, AND SAID SOMETHING INCOHERENT.

THE COPS TOOK IT AS AN ACT OF AGGRESSION AND OPENED FIRE. CAN'T HOLD IT AGAINST THEM SINCE THE KID HAD JUST PUT THREE IN THE OLD GUY, BUT I'M SURE THEY'RE IN FOR A YEAR OF UNION REPS, INVESTIGATIONS, AND DIRTY LOOKS FROM PASSERSBY.

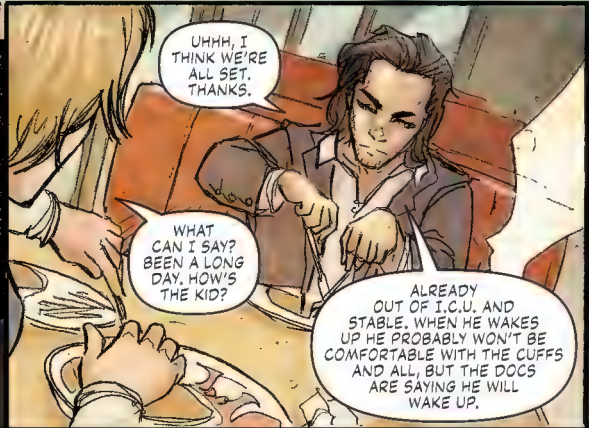
I KINDA FEEL FOR 'EM, YOU KNOW?

THINGS COUL'DVE GONE MUCH WORSE FOR THEM IF YOU AND YOUR PARTNER HADN'T SAVED THAT KID'S LIFE. HOW'D YOU DO THAT, ANYWAY?



WILL YOU BE NEEDING ANYTHING ELSE?

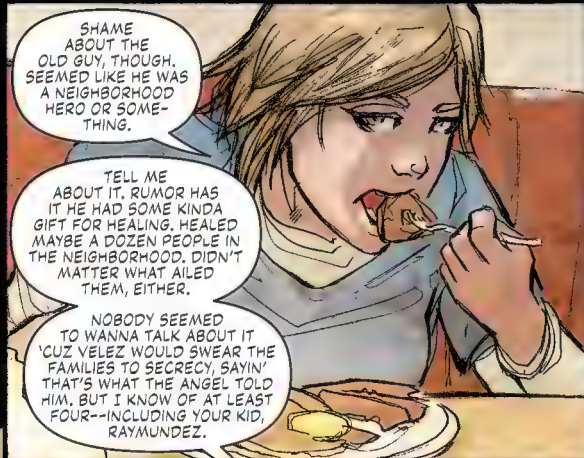
FRANKLY, DETECTIVE, I REALLY HAVE NO IDEA HOW THE KID SURVIVED. HE'D LOST SO MUCH BLOOD BY THE TIME WE ARRIVED, I DIDN'T THINK HE'D LAST ANOTHER MINUTE. WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING UNUSUAL. MMMMMM...



UHHH, I THINK WE'RE ALL SET. THANKS.

WHAT CAN I SAY? BEEN A LONG DAY. HOW'S THE KID?

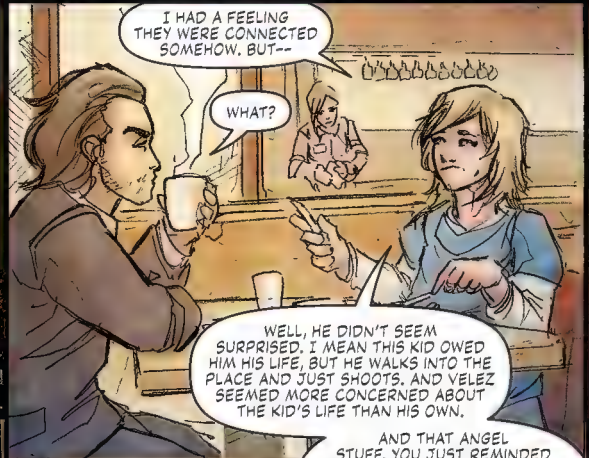
ALREADY OUT OF I.C.U. AND STABLE. WHEN HE WAKES UP HE PROBABLY WON'T BE COMFORTABLE WITH THE CUFFS AND ALL, BUT THE DOCS ARE SAYING HE WILL WAKE UP.



SHAME ABOUT THE OLD GUY, THOUGH. SEEMED LIKE HE WAS A NEIGHBORHOOD HERO OR SOMETHING.

TELL ME ABOUT IT. RUMOR HAS IT HE HAD SOME KINDA GIFT FOR HEALING. HEALED MAYBE A DOZEN PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. DIDN'T MATTER WHAT AILED THEM, EITHER.

NOBODY SEEMED TO WANNA TALK ABOUT IT 'CUZ VELEZ WOULD SWEAR THE FAMILIES TO SECRECY, SAYIN' THAT'S WHAT THE ANGEL TOLD HIM, BUT I KNOW OF AT LEAST FOUR--INCLUDING YOUR KID, RAYMUNDEZ.



I HAD A FEELING THEY WERE CONNECTED SOMEHOW. BUT--

WHAT?

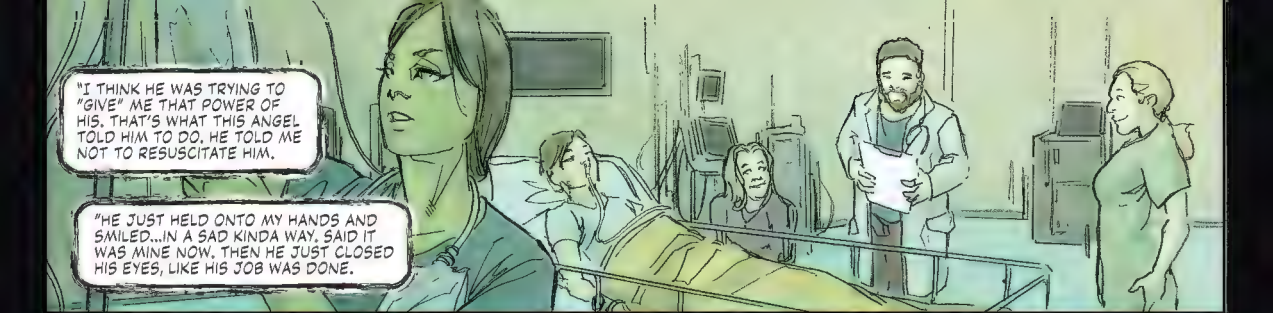
WELL, HE DIDN'T SEEM SURPRISED. I MEAN THIS KID OWED HIM HIS LIFE, BUT HE WALKS INTO THE PLACE AND JUST SHOOT. AND VELEZ SEEMED MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE KID'S LIFE THAN HIS OWN.

AND THAT ANGEL STUFF. YOU JUST REMINDED ME. HE DIDN'T SEEM SURPRISED TO SEE ME EITHER. SAID THE ANGEL WANTED ME TO HAVE SOME GIFT OR SOMETHING. BUT I SHOULD KEEP IT AWAY FROM THE KID.

ANY IDEA WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT? PLACE WAS FILLED WITH THAT SANTERIA CRAP. MAYBE IT WAS A CANDLE OR SOMETHING?

I DON'T THINK SO. SEEMED LIKE HE WAS TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING MORE... METAPHYSICAL.

'SCUSE ME? GOTTA GO EASY ON THE S.A.T. WORDS, CLARKE. PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION HERE.



"I THINK HE WAS TRYING TO
"GIVE" ME THAT POWER OF
HIS. THAT'S WHAT THIS ANGEL
TOLD HIM TO DO. HE TOLD ME
NOT TO RESUSCITATE HIM.

"HE JUST HELD ONTO MY HANDS AND
SMILED...IN A SAD KINDA WAY. SAID IT
WAS MINE NOW. THEN HE JUST CLOSED
HIS EYES, LIKE HIS JOB WAS DONE.



"I KNOW, I KNOW...
IT SOUNDS CRAZY
TO ME, TOO.

"BUT LIKE I SAID,
HE WAS VERY CLEAR
I SHOULD KEEP IT
AWAY FROM THE KID.



"LIKE HE WOULDN'T
MAKE IT TO HEAVEN
IF I USED IT ON HIM."



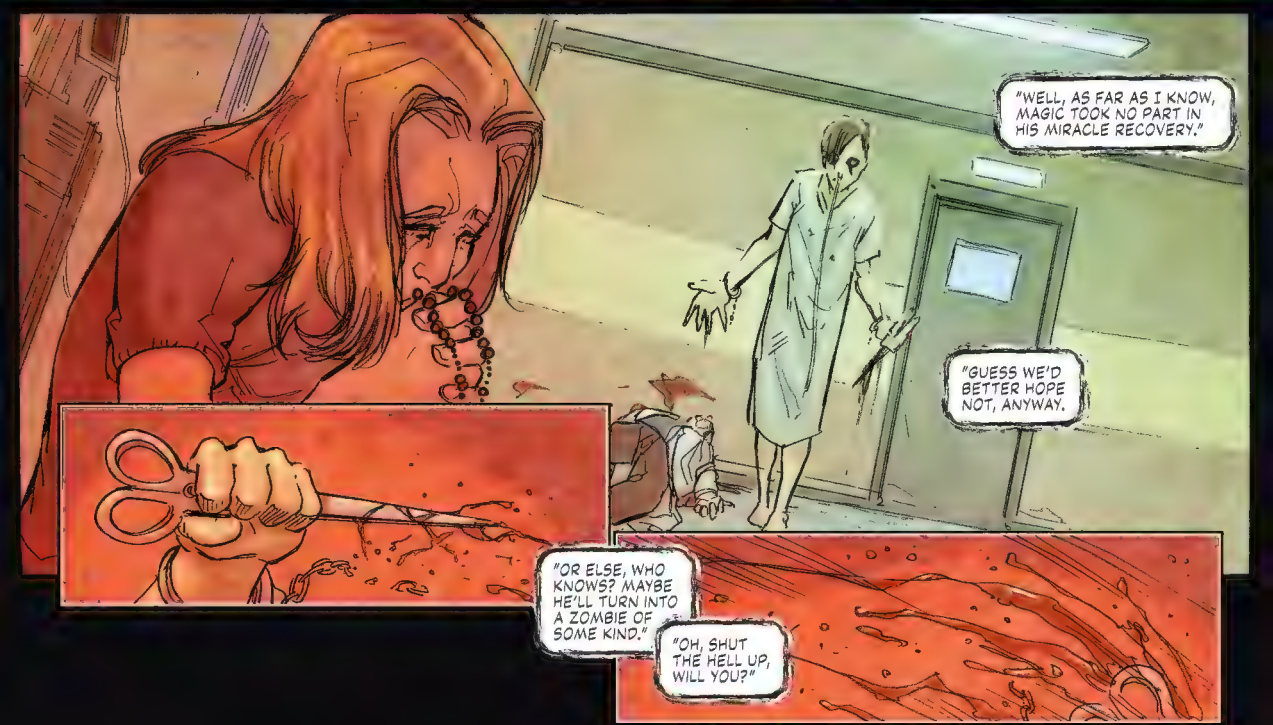
"THEN YOU TRIED TO SAVE
RAYMUNDEZ EVEN THOUGH
HE WAS RIDDLED WITH
BULLETS, AND HE LIVED,
DESPITE THE BLOOD LOSS
AND INTERNAL DAMAGE."

"NOW YOU'RE BELIEVING
THIS ANGEL CRAP, TOO?"



"I DIDN'T SAY
THAT, BUT YOU
MUST ADMIT IT
IS KINDA FREAKY,
YOU KNOW?"

"I JUST WONDER WHY HE WARNED
YOU NOT TO USE IT ON THE KID.
LIKE ALL HELL WOULD BREAK LOOSE
IF IT WAS USED TWICE ON THE
SAME PERSON OR SOMETHING.



"WELL, AS FAR AS I KNOW,
MAGIC TOOK NO PART IN
HIS MIRACLE RECOVERY."

"GUESS WE'D
BETTER HOPE
NOT, ANYWAY.

"OR ELSE, WHO
KNOWS? MAYBE
HE'LL TURN INTO
A ZOMBIE OF
SOME KIND."

"OH, SHUT
THE HELL UP,
WILL YOU?"



TO BE CONTINUED...

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss

A POWERFUL
AND DANGEROUS NEW TALE
FROM THE CO-CREATOR OF
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT: IRIS, WITCHBLADE
AND LEGEND OF THE SHADOW CLAN

#2

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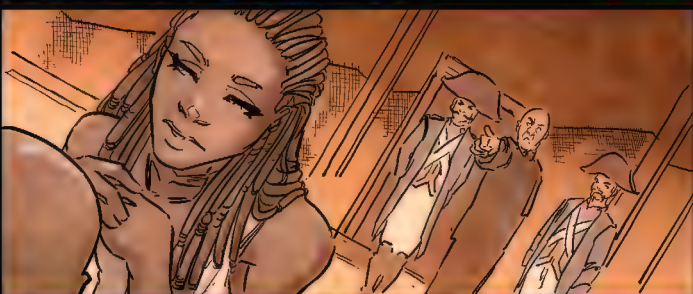
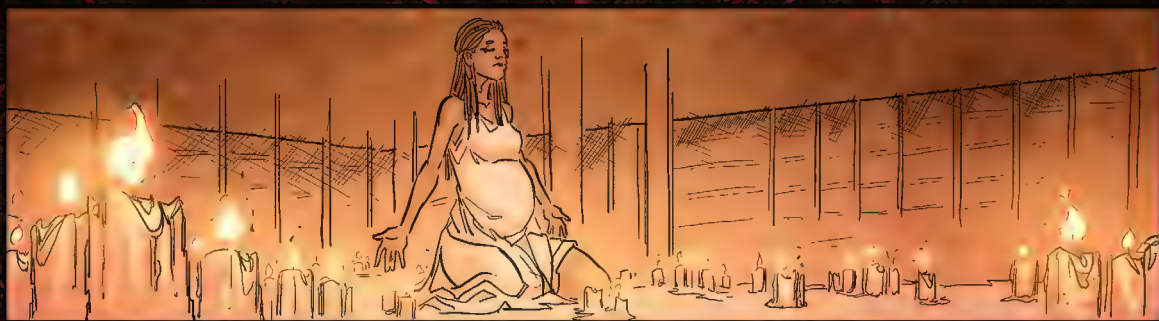
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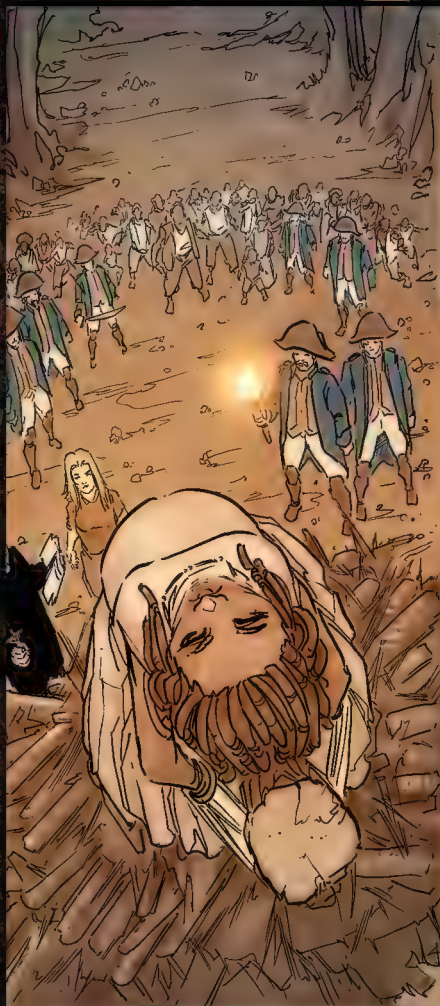
Santeria

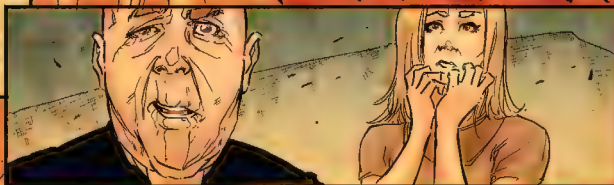
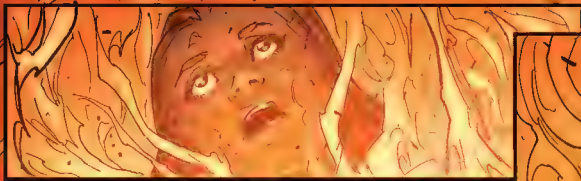
the Goddess Kiss

ISSUE TWO
PREVIEW









TO BE CONTINUED IN...
SANTERIA:
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VOLUME ONE
CHAPTER TWO OF FOUR

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss

PREVIOUSLY:

Several hundred years ago, the worshipers of Oonaa, led by their Priestess, Aamali, lived trouble-free lives in Eastern Africa amongst other tribes until they were sold into slavery by greedy elders who didn't believe in their religion. Becoming slaves in Cuba, Oonaa's servants continued to believe in their Goddess and even gained new worshipers once their fellow slaves saw her power in action when the master of the plantation died a painful death after taking Aamali against her will.

Today, the Goddess still has servants who believe they are acting on her behalf, and some are bestowed gifts of terrible power. Sometimes the power is even given to unknowing people, who then become part of Oonaa's grand design.

Now, in Spanish Harlem a medical student/EMT named Naomi Clarke is the newest unsuspecting recipient of the gift. And although she begins to realize something is amiss, she's quite unaware of the terrible price she must pay, and also of those who seek to use her for their own nefarious schemes...

"The Ties That Bind"

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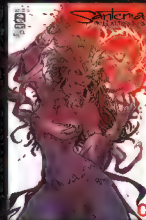
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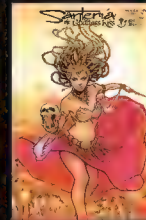
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IT'S IRONIC THAT CUBA, THE EXOTIC AND TUMULTUOUS ISLAND-NATION OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, HELD AN EQUALLY FIERY PAST.

ALTERNATELY CONTROLLED BY ENGLAND AND SPAIN OVER THE CENTURIES, IT EMBRACED SLAVERY, NOT UNLIKE ITS CARIBBEAN NEIGHBORS, BUT AS SPAIN'S GRIP OVER CUBA TIGHTENED, THE COLONISTS FOUND THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AT ODDS WITH THE DESPICABLE PRACTICE.

HOWEVER, AS IS USUALLY THE CASE, GREED WON OUT OVER CONSCIENCE, AND HAVING SLAVES WORKING THE SUGAR CANE FIELDS MEANT MORE PROFITS...AND MORE AFRICANS UPROOTED FROM THEIR LANDS.

BUT SLAVES OFTEN CAME WITH THEIR OWN BELIEFS, AND FELT NO GREAT NEED TO EMBRACE THEIR OPPRESSORS'. ESPECIALLY WHEN, UNLIKE THE CATHOLICS' EPHEMERAL DEITY, THE GODDESS OONAA'S POWERS WERE ON DISPLAY FOR ALL TO SEE...

NEWS OF THE DEATH SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE THROUGHOUT THE PLANTATION-- CREATING CONVERTS AMONG THE SLAVES, AND LOATHING FROM THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE...

...STRIKING DOWN THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION WERE HOURS AFTER HE VIOLATED HER PRIESTESS, AAMALI, AS HIS WIFE (AND SOON-TO-BE WIDOW) COULD ONLY WATCH IN HELPLESS HORROR.

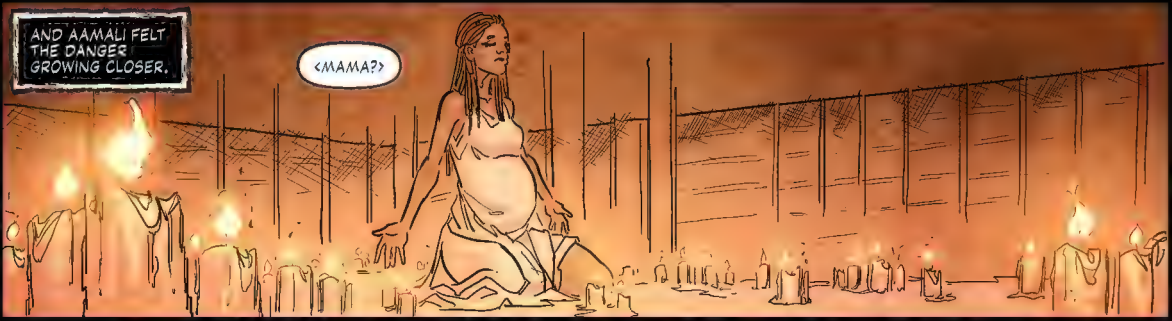
...WHO SEETHED WITH RIGHTEOUS ANGER AS SHE WITNESSED THE RAW SENSUALITY OF THIS WITCH WRITHING AMONGST HER HEATHEN DOGS.

HOW ELSE COULD ANY SANE PERSON EXPLAIN HOW JUST ONE NIGHT AFTER HER POOR HUSBAND WAS LURED INTO THIS HARLOT'S BED, THE CREATURE NOW GROWING WITHIN HER WAS ALREADY ON THE VERGE OF BURSTING FROM HER WOMB.

A SPAWN OF SATAN CREATED FROM LUST AND FOUL MAGICS.

MAGICS THAT EVEN NOW WERE BEING USED TO BEGUILF MORE AND MORE SLAVES INTO FOLLOWING HER DARK PATH.

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE KNEW WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT WHATEVER GREW INSIDE THAT SEDUCTRESS MUST BE SNUFFED OUT OF EXISTENCE...ALONG WITH ITS VILE MOTHER.



AND AAMALI FELT THE DANGER GROWING CLOSER.

<MAMA?>



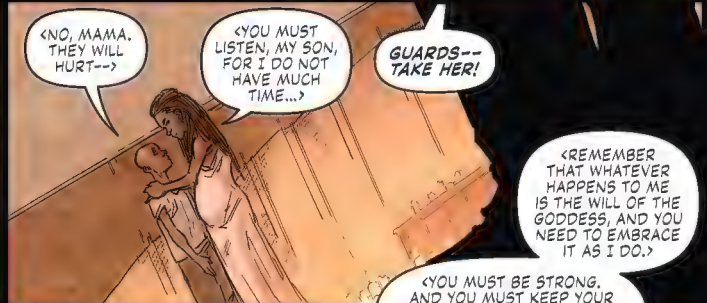
<I'M SORRY TO DISTURB YOU, BUT THERE ARE MEN HERE DEMANDING TO SEE YOU.>

<I TOLD THEM YOU WERE IN PRAYER AND NOT TO BE DISTURBED BUT THEY-->

<SHHHHH... IT'S ALL RIGHT, THE GODDESS KNOWS ALL AND ALERTED ME OF THEIR APPROACH.>

<I AM TO GO WITH THESE MEN AS IT IS HER WILL-->*

*[TRANSLATED FROM YORUBA LANGUAGE.]



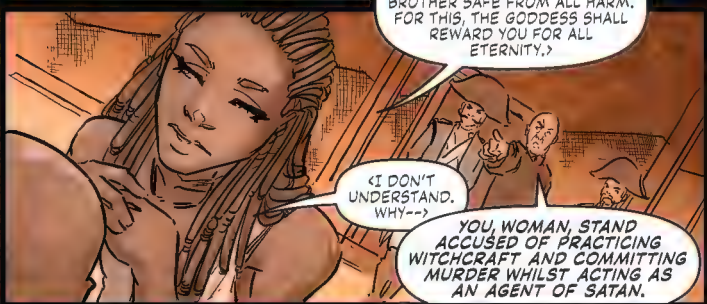
<NO, MAMA. THEY WILL HURT-->

<YOU MUST LISTEN, MY SON, FOR I DO NOT HAVE MUCH TIME...>

GUARDS-- TAKE HER!

<REMEMBER THAT WHATEVER HAPPENS TO ME IS THE WILL OF THE GODDESS, AND YOU NEED TO EMBRACE IT AS I DO.>

<YOU MUST BE STRONG, AND YOU MUST KEEP YOUR BROTHER SAFE FROM ALL HARM. FOR THIS, THE GODDESS SHALL REWARD YOU FOR ALL ETERNITY.>



<I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY-->

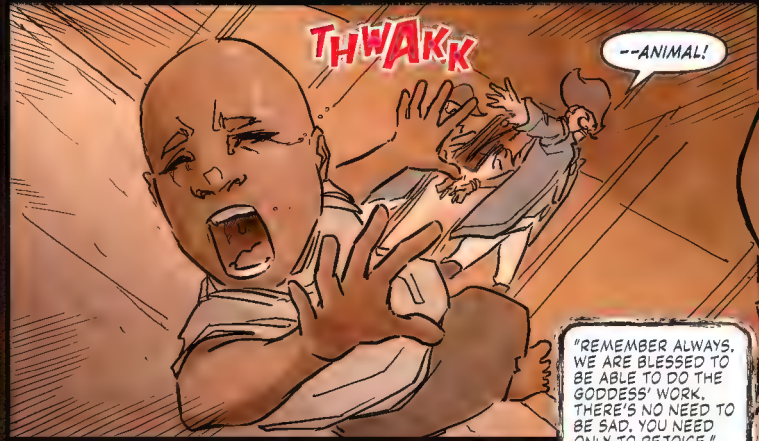
YOU, WOMAN, STAND ACCUSED OF PRACTICING WITCHCRAFT AND COMMITTING MURDER WHILST ACTING AS AN AGENT OF SATAN.



YOU SHALL BE TRIED FOR YOUR CRIMES ONE DAY HENCE.

GET OFF ME YOU--

NO!!! STOP!

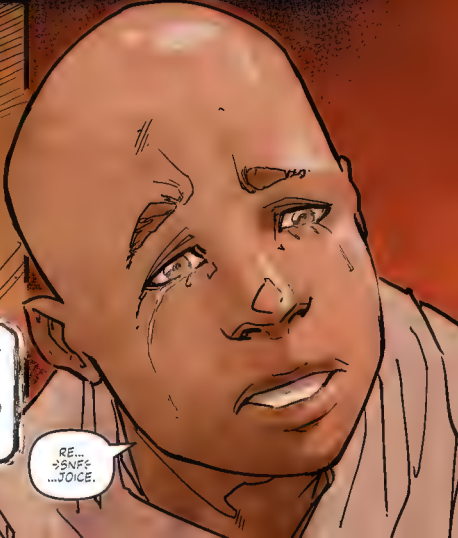


THWAKK

--ANIMAL!

"REMEMBER ALWAYS. WE ARE BLESSED TO BE ABLE TO DO THE GODDESS' WORK. THERE'S NO NEED TO BE SAD. YOU NEED ONLY TO REJOICE."

RE...
--SNFF--
...JOICE.

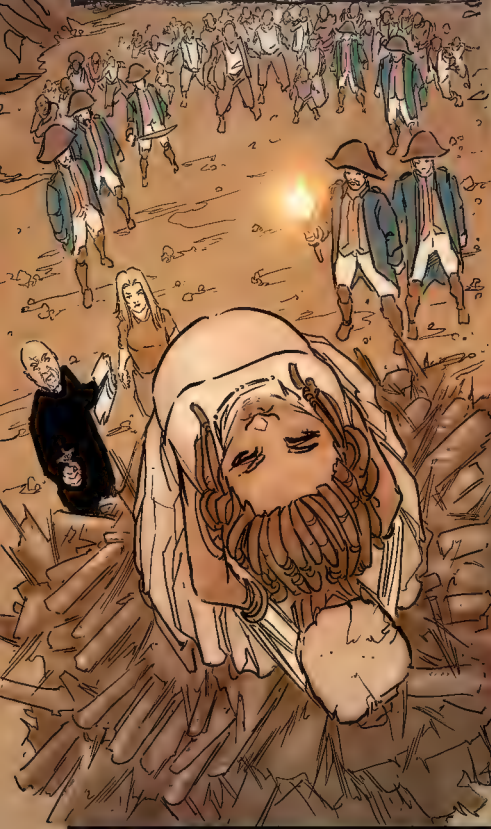




THE TRIAL, AS ONE COULD GUESS, WAS A FARCE. HER CHOICES WERE TO ADMIT HER GUILT, OR REFUSE, IN WHICH CASE SHE'D BE VICIOUSLY WHIPPED FIRST AND THEN FOUND GUILTY.

SHE CHOSE THE LATTER, OF COURSE, TO SHOW HER LOVE OF THE GODDESS.

AND WITH EVERY STRIKE FROM THE WHIP, SHE NEITHER WHIMPERED NOR CRIED OUT IN PAIN. SHE MERELY SMILED AND SPOKE THE GODDESS' NAME WITH EVER-INCREASING FERVOR.



THE PRIEST DECLARED HER GUILT AND SHE WAS TOLD OF HER SENTENCE, BUT SHE APPEARED NOT TO HEAR AS SHE BEGAN TO SING HER PRAISE OF OONAA.



THERE WAS OPEN WEEPING AMONGST THE ONLOOKERS...AS WELL AS SOMETHING MUCH DARKER SIMMERING BELOW.



AND AS THE PRIEST DECLARED THE SENTENCE TO BE METED OUT, AAMALI'S SONG ROSE, AS IF IN RESPONSE...



AND THE REST OF THE GODDESS' FOLLOWERS, BOTH OLD AND NEW, SLOWLY, DEFIANTLY, BEGAN TO JOIN IN THE SONG AS THE EXECUTIONER PERFORMED HIS DUTY.

WHATEVER SATISFACTION THE WIDOW WAS EXPECTING FROM THIS EVENT WAS QUICKLY DISSOLVING AND TRANSFORMING INTO A GROWING APPREHENSION.

NEARLY CONSUMED
BY THE FLAME BUT
SEEMINGLY UNFAZED
BY IT, AAMALI'S
SONG STILL ROSE
ABOVE THE ROAR...

...BUT HER WORDS
TURNED FROM PRAISE
OF THE GODDESS TO
AN OFFER OF HERSELF
TO OONAA...

...BEGGING THE
GODDESS TO
CLEANSE THIS FOUL
PLACE SO THAT
HER CHILDREN
COULD LIVE ON IN
OONAA'S SERVICE.

AND THE GODDESS' REPLY
WAS SUDDEN AND PALPABLE...

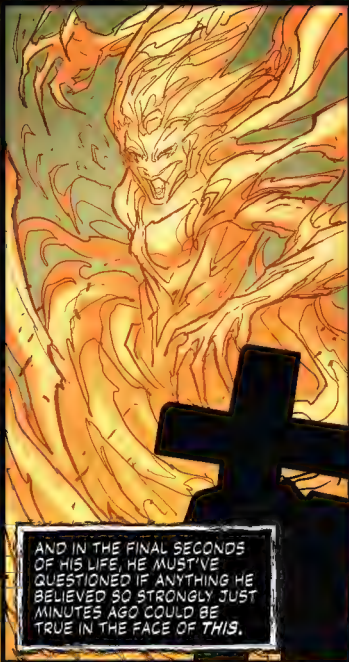
...THE VENGEANCE
THAT AAMALI SOUGHT
WAS UPON THEM.





AWAY,
CREATURE
OF SATAN!
YOU HOLD
NO POWER
HERE!

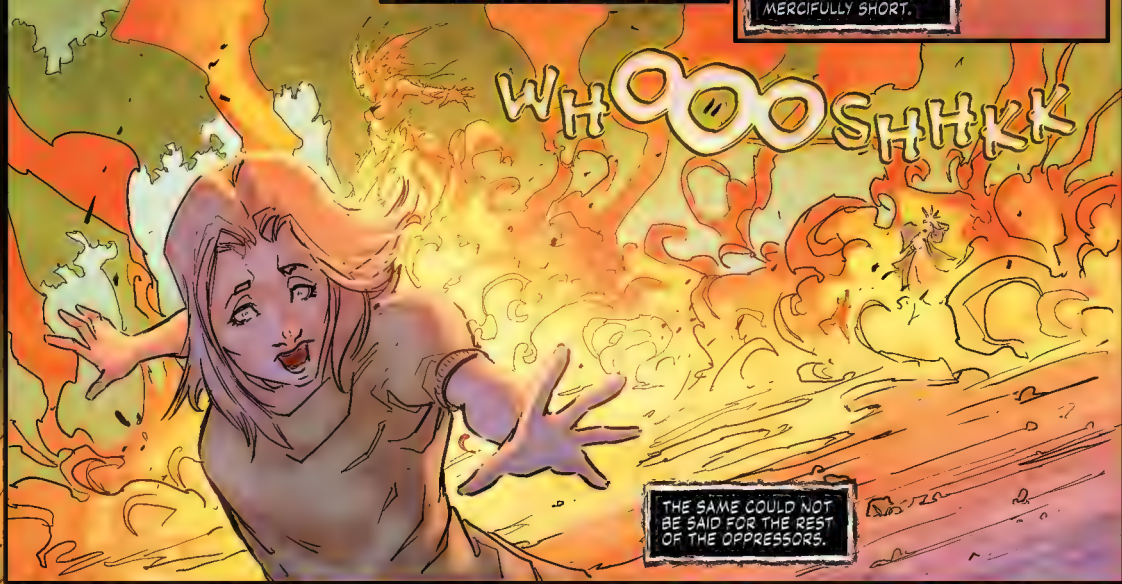
EVEN AS HE
SAID THE
WORDS, THE
PRIEST KNEW
THEY WERE
HOLLOW.



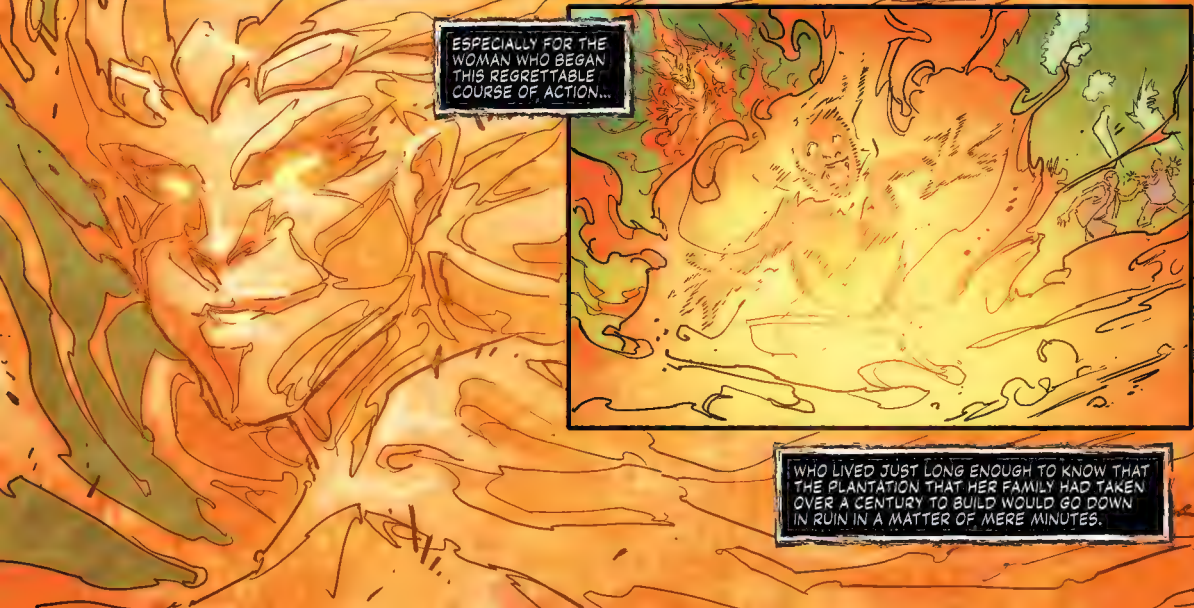
AND IN THE FINAL SECONDS
OF HIS LIFE, HE MUST'VE
QUESTIONED IF ANYTHING HE
BELIEVED SO STRONGLY JUST
MINUTES AGO COULD BE
TRUE IN THE FACE OF THIS.



FORTUNATELY HIS TIME
FOR RUMINATION WAS
MERCIFULLY SHORT.



THE SAME COULD NOT
BE SAID FOR THE REST
OF THE OPPRESSORS.

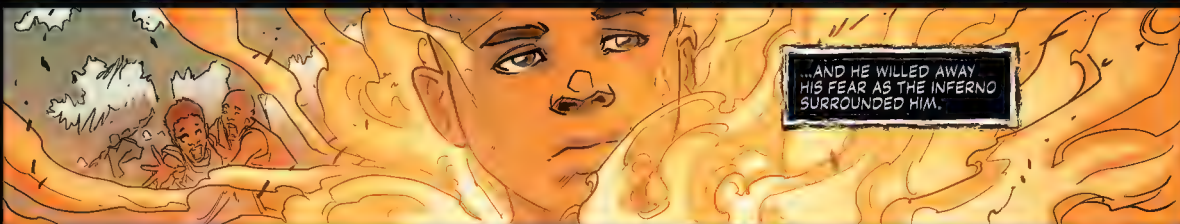


ESPECIALLY FOR THE
WOMAN WHO BEGAN
THIS REGRETTABLE
COURSE OF ACTION...

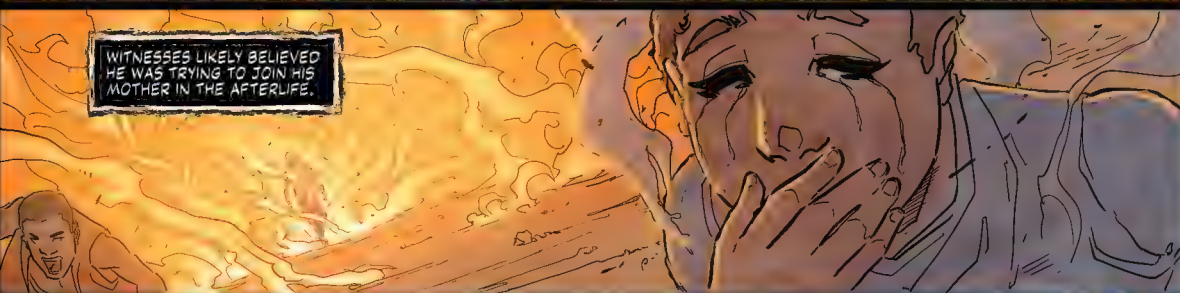
WHO LIVED JUST LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT
THE PLANTATION THAT HER FAMILY HAD TAKEN
OVER A CENTURY TO BUILD WOULD GO DOWN
IN RUIN IN A MATTER OF MERE MINUTES.



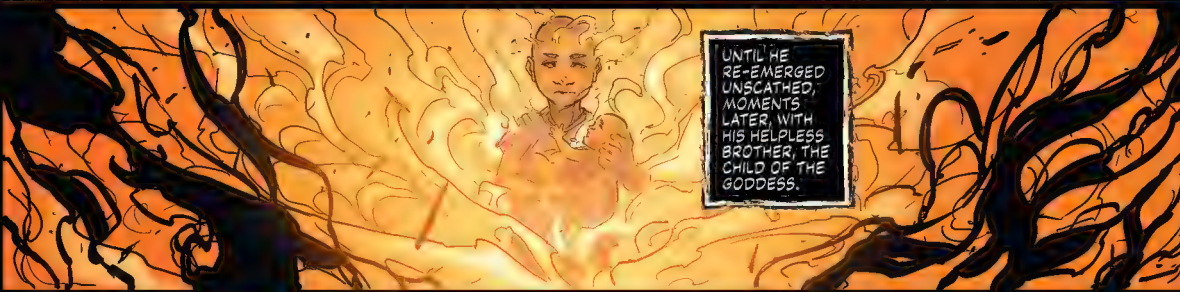
AMIDST THE CHAOS
THAT HAD ERUPTED, THE
BOY REMEMBERED HIS
MOTHER'S WORDS...



...AND HE WILLED AWAY
HIS FEAR AS THE INFERNO
SURROUNDED HIM.



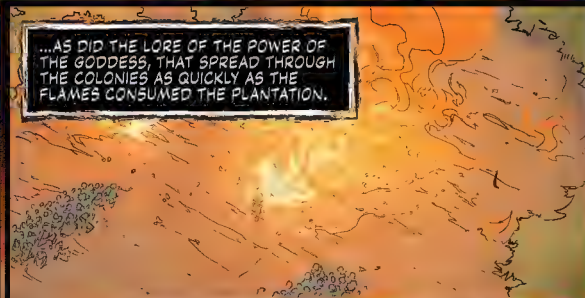
WITNESSES LIKELY BELIEVED
HE WAS TRYING TO JOIN HIS
MOTHER IN THE AFTERLIFE.



UNTIL HE
RE-EMERGED
UNSCATHED,
MOMENTS
LATER, WITH
HIS HELPLESS
BROTHER, THE
CHILD OF THE
GODDESS.



PROTECTING HIS BROTHER
FROM THE OPPRESSIVE HEAT,
HIS EXODUS BEGAN...



...AS DID THE LORE OF THE POWER OF
THE GODDESS, THAT SPREAD THROUGH
THE COLONIES AS QUICKLY AS THE
FLAMES CONSUMED THE PLANTATION.



IT WAS ON THIS DAY THAT SANTERIA
WAS TRULY BORN, ALONGSIDE THE
HUMAN CHILD, WHO HELD WITHIN
HIM, OONAA'S SPIRIT, MADE FLESH.

TODAY.

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M DOING HERE.

WEEEOOOOEEEOOOOEEEOOOO

NO IDEA WHY IT FEELS LIKE I'M SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE--OR, AT THE VERY LEAST, INVOLVED...

BUT THAT'S RIDICULOUS. WE HANDLED THE RAYMUNDEZ KID LIKE WE WOULD ANYONE.

IT'S NOT LIKE I TRANSFORMED THIS PREVIOUSLY UNASSUMING STRAIGHT-A STUDENT INTO A HOMICIDAL MANIAC, OVERNIGHT.

KID JUST LOST IT, OBVIOUSLY EVEN BEFORE I GOT THERE, JUDGING FROM TIO FERNANDO'S CURRENT CONDITION.

DON'T USE THE GIFT ON THE KID. FERNANDO'S LAST WORDS.

HE MUST'VE JUST MEANT WE SHOULDN'T TRY TO SAVE HIS LIFE, BECAUSE HE COULD STILL MAKE IT TO HEAVEN, OR SOMETHING. NOTHING MORE THAN THAT...RIGHT?

HEY CLARKE, YOU OKAY? I COULD STILL DROP YOU AT--

BUT DAMMIT, EVEN IF IT WAS JUST THAT, HOW DID FERNANDO KNOW THAT ERICK WOULD BECOME MICHAEL MEYERS ALL OF A SUDDEN.

I'M FINE. I...GUESS THE LACK OF SLEEP IS JUST CATCHING UP WITH ME.

SERIOUSLY, IT'S REALLY NOT A BIG DEAL TO DROP YOU OFF FIRST.

JESUS, LISTEN TO ME. NOW IT'S ALMOST SOUNDING PLAUSIBLE.

LOOK, I APPRECIATE THE CHIVALRY, CHOE. I REALLY DO. BUT IT'S NOT MY FIRST RODEO, YOU KNOW?

WHOA. ONE DATE AND WE'RE ALREADY UP TO COWBOY METAPHORS? MIGHT BE MY CUE TO MOSEY.

AND AN OLD MAN MIGHT JUST HAVE GIVEN ME SOME KIND OF MIRACULOUS MAGICAL ABILITY THAT CAN SAVE LIVES, BUT THE SLIGHT SIDE EFFECT IS THEY MIGHT WAKE UP HOMICIDAL...

FIRST OF ALL, THAT WAS CUTE.

SECOND, IF YOU CONSIDER THAT A DATE, WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR PART TWO--THE PORT AUTHORITY BOWLING ALLEY?

UM, I THINK THAT WAS THREE.

LET'S RE-START THE FURTY BANTER AT A TIME AND PLACE T.B.D., ALRIGHT? I'M GOING IN.

REPORT SAID FIVE DEAD: DOCTOR, TWO NURSES, DAHLIA RAYMUNDEZ, AND OF COURSE, HER SON.

NO MEASURABLE BRAIN FUNCTIONING AT THE TIME OF THE ATTACK.

HE WAS IN A COMA AT THE MOMENT HE BEGAN HIS RAMPAGE BY GRABBING A NURSE AS SHE TRIED TO CHANGE HIS I.V. DRIP.

AND STILL IN A COMA WHEN HE HAD THE WHEREWITHAL TO DRAW ON THE WALL (IN BLOOD, OF COURSE), JUST SECONDS BEFORE HE KNEELED DOWN AND PLUNGED A SCALPEL INTO HIS OWN CHEST.

OH... MY...GOD.

I SAW THAT SYMBOL...IN MY DREAM. BUT--HOW?

HEY, DETECTIVE CHOE! GLAD YOU COULD JOIN THE PARTY. WITH A DATE, NO LESS.

I DON'T BELIEVE I'VE HAD THE PLEASURE...

THIS IS NAOMI CLARKE. SHE WAS THE E.M.T. WHO TREATED RAYMUNDEZ AT THE BOTANICA. WHAT TIME ARE THEY THINKING THIS ALL WENT DOWN?

SOMEWHERE IN THE VICINITY OF TWO A.M. THERE WERE FOUR NURSES ON DUTY, THE OTHER TWO WERE ON BREAK.

BUT WHERE ARE MY MANNERS? DETECTIVE WENDELL CHARLES, PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, MS. CLARKE.

HI, I...
UH...

I CAN'T BE HERE.

HEY...I GOTTA RUN. MY SHIFT IS STARTING AND I TOLD MY PARTNER TO MEET ME DOWNSTAIRS.

CHOE. I'LL CALL YOU SOON.

I PROMISE.

YOU SUNUVABITCH! YOU ASKED HER OUT, DIDNT YOU?

NOT EXACTLY THE BEST FIRST DATE THOUGH, HUM?

I'D HAVE DONE IT YOUR WAY, BUT THE STRIP CLUBS WERE CLOSED.

ANYONE SEE ANYTHING HERE?

NOBODY ALIVE.

GREAT.

THIS JUST GETS MORE AND MORE \$%%ED UP.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS. ANY OF THIS.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I COULD TALK TO ABOUT IT WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE A LOON.



NO OFFENSE BUT YOU LOOK LIKE \$#!\$, NAOMI, WHAT'S UP? DID THE KID WE SAVED REALLY KILL THOSE PEOPLE?

YES...BUT I CAN'T TALK ABOUT IT YET, ALRIGHT, MICHAEL?

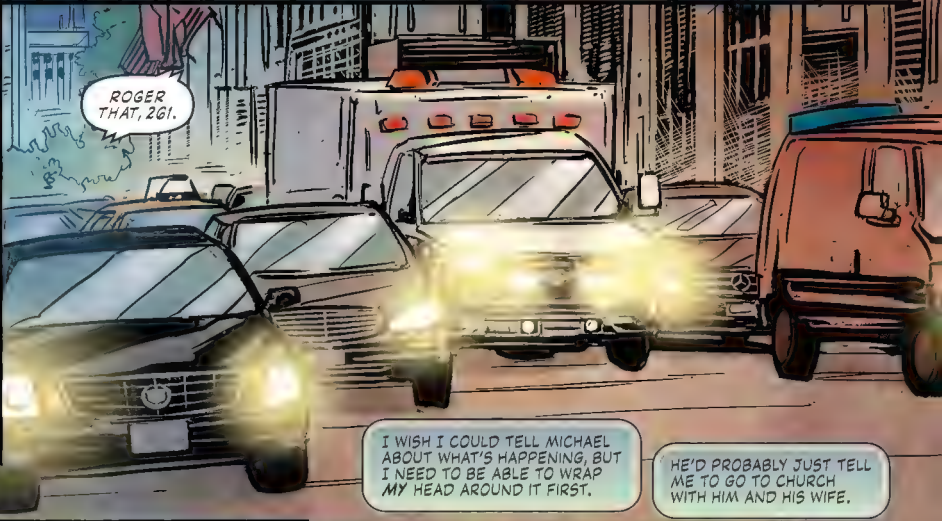
DAMN. I--HAVE YOU GOTTEN ANY SLEEP AT ALL YET?

NOT A WINK. THIS'LL BE A LONG ONE.



THIS IS DISPATCH LOOKING FOR ANY UNITS NEAR YORK AVENUE AND 121ST. HIT-AND-RUN VICTIM.

DISPATCH THIS IS 261 DEPARTING LENOX HILL EN ROUTE.



ROGER THAT, 261.

I WISH I COULD TELL MICHAEL ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING, BUT I NEED TO BE ABLE TO WRAP MY HEAD AROUND IT FIRST.

HE'D PROBABLY JUST TELL ME TO GO TO CHURCH WITH HIM AND HIS WIFE.



YOU SURE THERE'S NOTHIN' ON YOUR MIND, PARTNER?

I DON'T...IT'S JUST...SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ME IN THAT BOTANICA YESTERDAY. I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT YET, AND I CERTAINLY CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO EXPLAIN IT, BUT...



YOU'VE CHANGED.

I HAVE...

...AND I'M SCARED.



HOLY...YOU'D THINK DISPATCH WOULD MENTION SOMETHING ABOUT A RIOT.

YOU SEE THE VIC?

THAT MUST BE HER BY THE CAMARO.

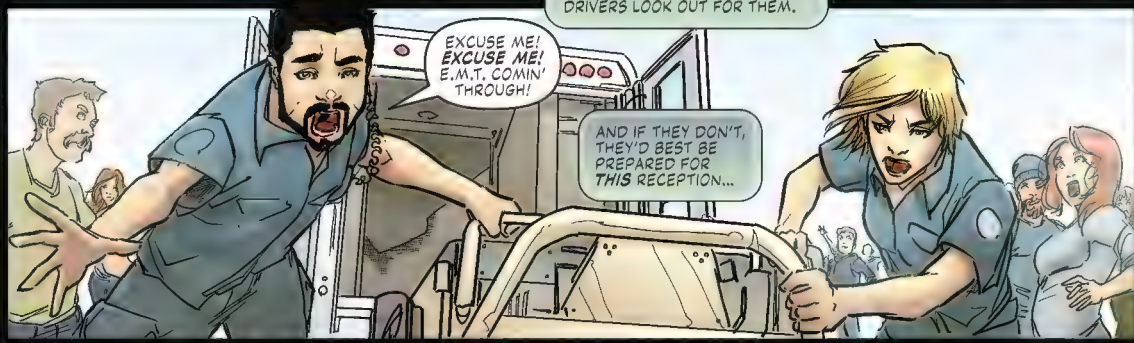
OH MY GOD...SHE'S SO YOUNG!



THIS ONE ISN'T TOO DIFFICULT TO ASSESS. PAIR OF PART-TIME YANKEE FANS DECIDED TO SAVE SOME TOLL MONEY BY GOING THROUGH SPANISH HARLEM TO GET TO THE RICKETY MACOMBS DAM BRIDGE BY YANKEE STADIUM.

PEOPLE WHO OWN CAMAROS RARELY LIVE IN THE CITY SINCE THEY'D GET BROKEN INTO ROUGHLY EVERY OTHER DAY, SO THESE CLOWNS FROM THE BURBS AREN'T USED TO NEIGHBORHOODS LIKE THIS...

...WHERE A MOM DOES TELL HER LITTLE GIRL TO "GO PLAY IN THE STREET" BECAUSE EVERYONE PLAYS IN THE STREET, AND DRIVERS LOOK OUT FOR THEM.



EXCUSE ME! EXCUSE ME! E.M.T. COMIN' THROUGH!

AND IF THEY DON'T, THEY'D BEST BE PREPARED FOR THIS RECEPTION...



HELLO, MA'AM. I'M MICHAEL, THIS IS NAOMI. WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

OH, GOD, PLEASE HELP MY DAUGHTER, ANGELA! HER HEAD IS BLEEDING AND SHE WON'T WAKE UP!

I PROMISE WE'LL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN FOR ANGELA. SHE'S IN GOOD HANDS.

CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED?



SHE WAS JUMPING ROPE...*"SNFF"*...AND SHE TRIPPED INTO THE STREET. SHE WAS ONLY TWO FEET FROM THE CURB. I WAS LOOKIN' RIGHT AT HER, TELLING HER TO GET BACK ON THE SIDEWALK.

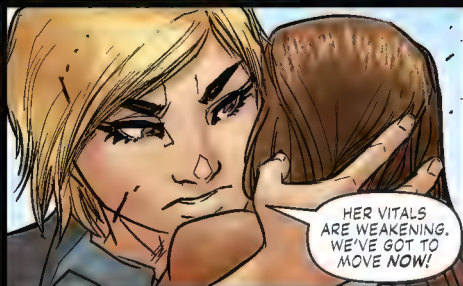
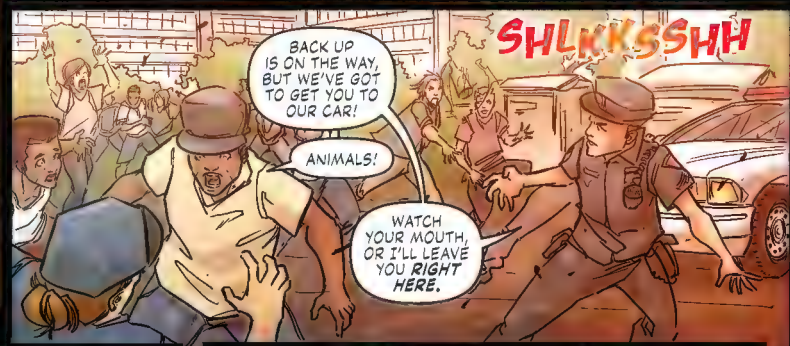
SHE TURNED TO LOOK AT ME, I HEARD A SCREECH, AND THOSE PUTAS TRIED TO PASS A CAR ON THE RIGHT AND... RAN INTO MY BABY GIRL.

PULSE IS VERY WEAK AND ERRATIC. NO PUPIL REACTIVITY AT ALL. THIS IS NOT GOOD. SHE NEEDS TO BE IN A HOSPITAL.

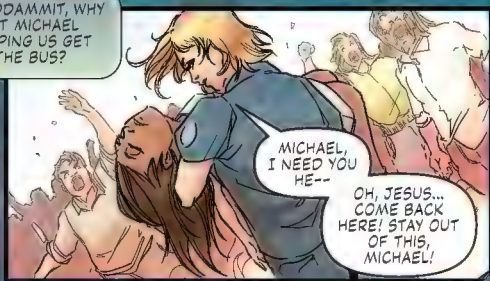


THEY'RE NOT GONNA HAVE THOSE COPS AROUND THEM FOREVER!

AND I REALLY DON'T LIKE THE WAY THIS CROWD IS LOOKING.



GODDAMMIT, WHY
ISN'T MICHAEL
HELPING US GET
TO THE BUS?



MICHAEL,
I NEED YOU
HE--

OH, JESUS...
COME BACK
HERE! STAY OUT
OF THIS,
MICHAEL!

HE'S GONNA GET
HIMSELF KILLED.



THIS MOB IS GONNA
GET US ALL KILLED.

EVERYBODY
JUST STOP!

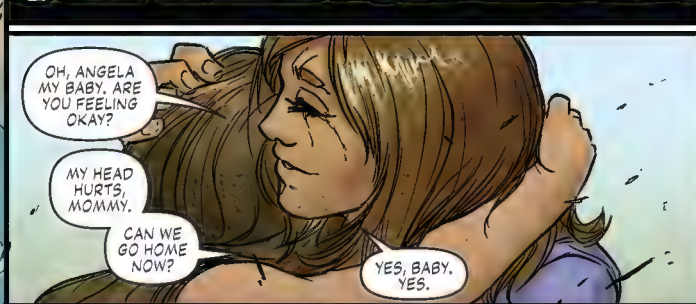
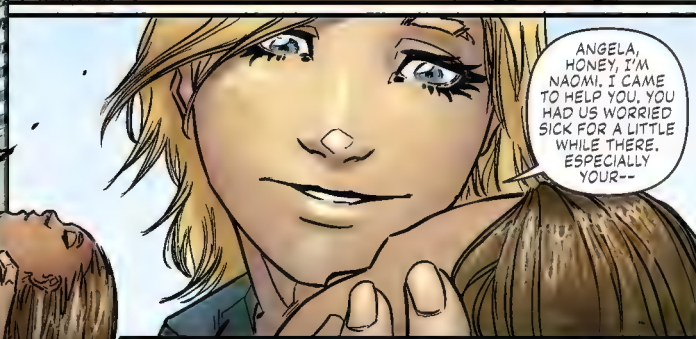
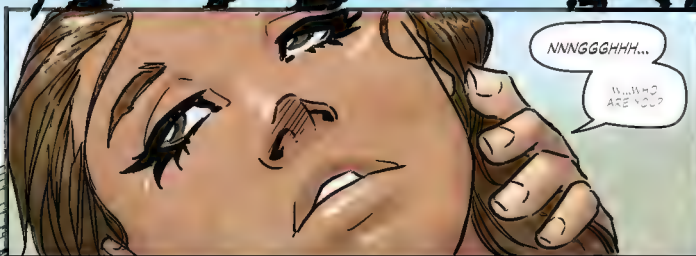
STOP!



WHARRROOOSSHHHHH



WHAT...THE...HELL...?!





LATER...

POLICE REPORT SAID IT WAS A FLASH GRENADE. MICHAEL SCOFFED WHEN HE SAW THAT.

SERVING TWO TOURS IN AFGHANISTAN, HE SAID HE'S SEEN HUNDREDS GO OFF, AND HE NEVER FELT ANY KIND OF BLAST EVEN TWENTY FEET AWAY, LET ALONE 200.

NO POINT IN REFUTING THE STATEMENT, THOUGH. NOT LIKE WE HAVE ANY BETTER THEORIES WE'D LIKE TO SHARE.

BRANDON ASKED ME TO DROP BY FOR A QUICK CHAT. APPARENTLY HE'S LEARNED SOME NEW INFO I SERIOUSLY DOUBT I WANT TO HEAR.

IT'S...
-SNFF-
MY BOY, CHARLIE. HE'S...
-SNFF-
MISSING.

I'M VERY SORRY TO HEAR THAT, MS. MITCHELL. WE'LL DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO GET HIM BACK TO YOU SAFELY.

GOD, I HOPE SO. HE'S THE WORLD TO ME.

LOOKS LIKE DETECTIVE CHARLES HAS HIS HANDS FULL.

CAN YOU TELL ME HOW LONG HE'S BEEN MISSING?

I--I THINK...
-SNFF-
MUST BE GOIN' ON TWO--THREE DAYS NOW.

HOW DID YOU LO--EXCUSE ME-- ACTUALLY, DO YOU HAVE A PHOTO WE CAN USE TO GET THE SEARCH GOING?

OH, YES-- I GOT THAT, DETECTIVE. HE WAS SUCH A GOOD BOY. NOT A BAD BONE IN HIS BODY.

JUST ONE MORE QUESTION-- CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE YOU LAST SAW HIM?

MUST'VE BEEN IN THE 141ST STREET PROJ--NO, NO THAT AIN'T RIGHT. IN ALL THE EXCITEMENT IT MUST'A JUST SLIPPED MY MIND.

THAT POOR KID. CAN SEE HER TRACK MARKS FROM HERE--

NAOMI!

ARE YOU OKAY? THE WHOLE PRECINCT IS TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED.

YEAH. COUPLA TENSE MOMENTS, BUT LUCKILY THE OFFICERS OF THE 25TH CAME PREPARED.

OH, YEAH. THAT SOUNDS LIKE OUR TEAM, ALL RIGHT.

LISTEN, I GOT SOME NEW INFORMATION I WANTED TO SHARE WITH YOU. YOU MIND FOLLOWING ME?

THANK GOD, I THOUGHT THIS WAS ANOTHER "DATE."

FUNNY. LET'S GO IN HERE SO WE CAN HAVE SOME QUIET.

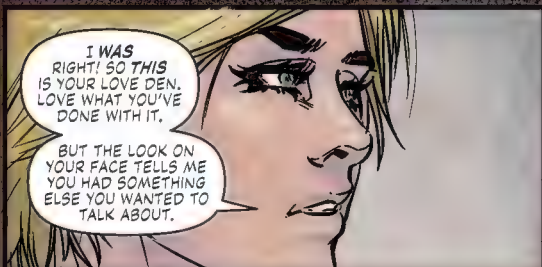


I ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT IT'D BE LIKE TO BE IN ONE OF THESE ROOMS. DO I NEED MY LAWYER?

NAH, THAT'D JUST MAKE YOU LOOK GUILTY.

WOW, YOU SOUND LIKE A REAL COP ALL OF A SUDDEN.

YOU WANNA BE HANDCUFFED TO THE TABLE FOR THE FULL EFFECT?



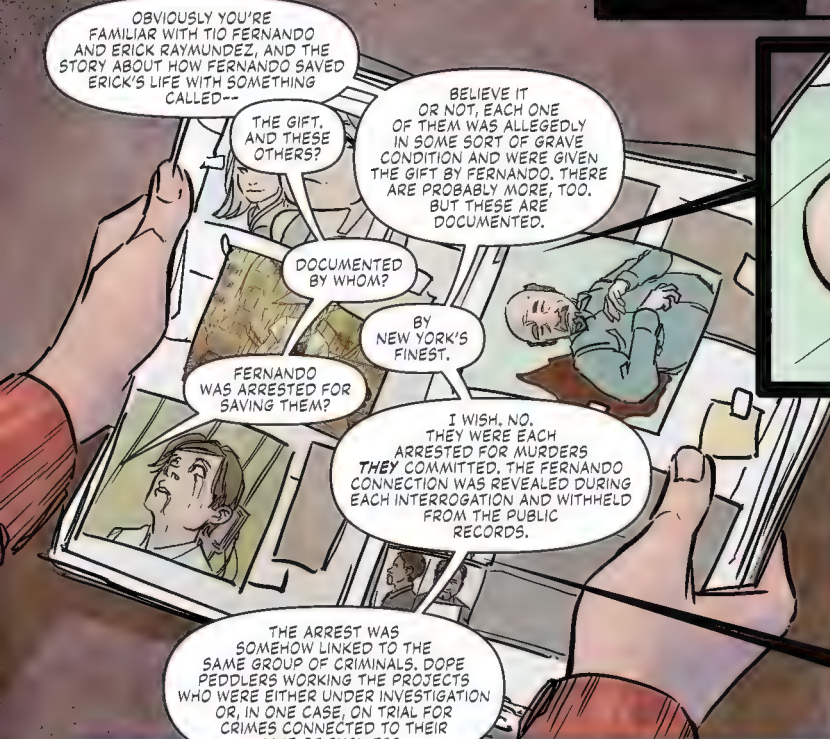
I WAS RIGHT! SO THIS IS YOUR LOVE DEN. LOVE WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH IT.

BUT THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE TELLS ME YOU HAD SOMETHING ELSE YOU WANTED TO TALK ABOUT.



JUST WANTED TO FILL YOU IN ON WHAT I'VE LEARNED SINCE WE LAST SPOKE.

TAKE A LOOK AT THESE.



OBSOLETELY YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH TIO FERNANDO AND ERICK RAYMUNDEZ, AND THE STORY ABOUT HOW FERNANDO SAVED ERICK'S LIFE WITH SOMETHING CALLED--

THE GIFT, AND THESE OTHERS?

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, EACH ONE OF THEM WAS ALLEGEDLY IN SOME SORT OF GRAVE CONDITION AND WERE GIVEN THE GIFT BY FERNANDO. THERE ARE PROBABLY MORE, TOO. BUT THESE ARE DOCUMENTED.

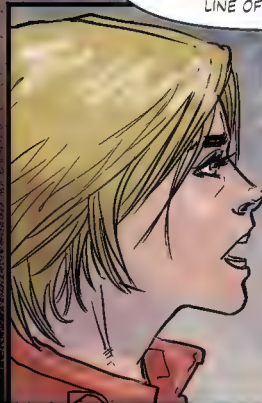
DOCUMENTED BY WHOM?

BY NEW YORK'S FINEST.

FERNANDO WAS ARRESTED FOR SAVING THEM?

I WISH, NO. THEY WERE EACH ARRESTED FOR MURDERS THEY COMMITTED. THE FERNANDO CONNECTION WAS REVEALED DURING EACH INTERROGATION AND WITHHELD FROM THE PUBLIC RECORDS.

THE ARREST WAS SOMEHOW LINKED TO THE SAME GROUP OF CRIMINALS, DOPE PEDDLERS WORKING THE PROJECTS WHO WERE EITHER UNDER INVESTIGATION OR, IN ONE CASE, ON TRIAL FOR CRIMES CONNECTED TO THEIR LINE OF BUSINESS.



NONE OF THEM CLAIMED TO REMEMBER COMMITTING THE CRIME, AND NONE HAD PRIOR CRIMINAL RECORDS. JUST LIKE RAYMUNDEZ.

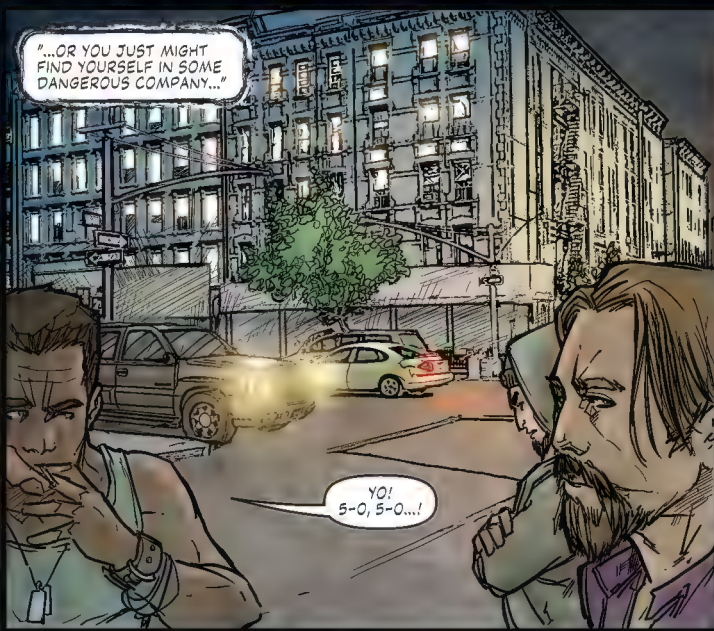
-GASP- NO...WAX.

YOU DON'T SERIOUSLY BELIEVE ANY OF THIS CRAP, DO YOU?

CLARKE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE...

...EXCEPT THAT YOU'VE BEEN DRAGGED INTO THIS SOMEHOW, SO I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU TO BE CAREFUL...



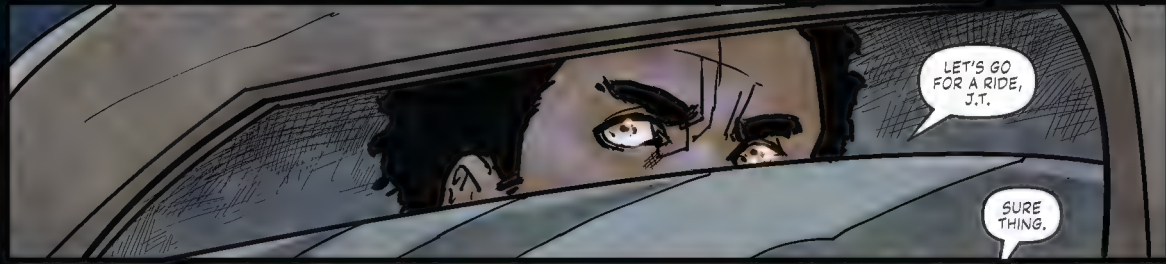


"...OR YOU JUST MIGHT FIND YOURSELF IN SOME DANGEROUS COMPANY..."

YO!
5-0, 5-0!!!

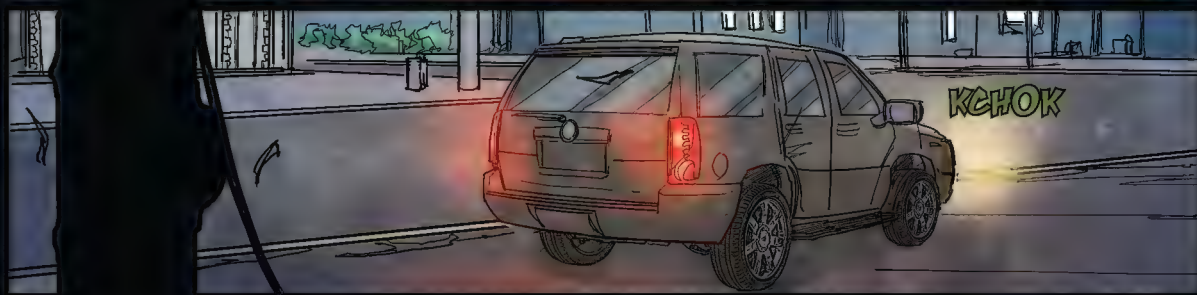
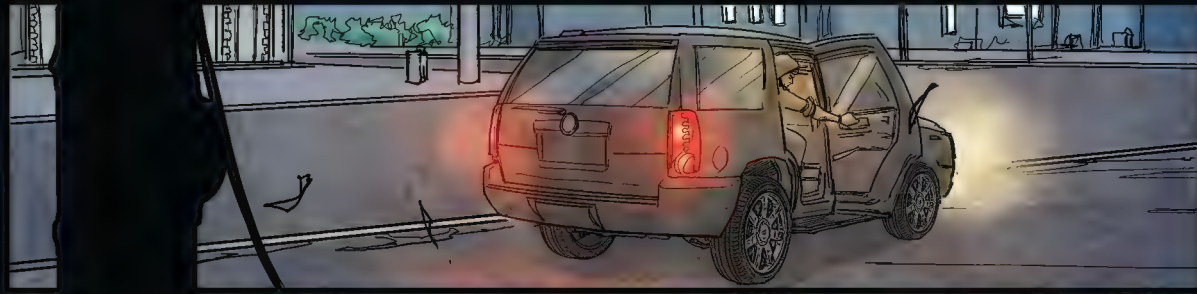
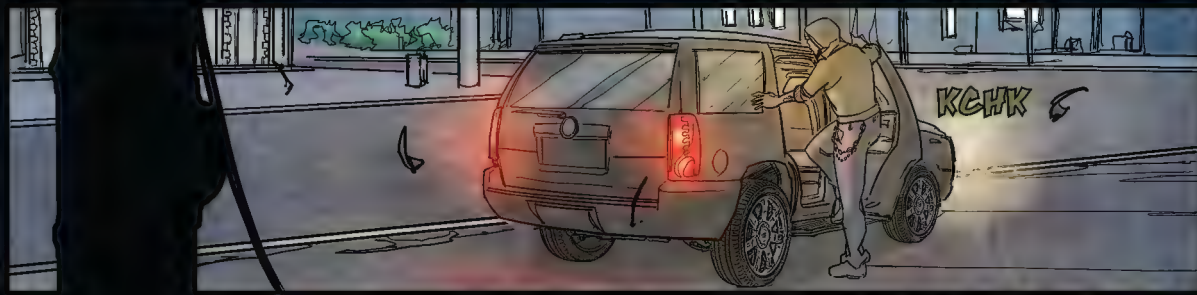


NAW,
BODIE, I GOT
THIS. YOU BOYS
TAKE FIVE.



LET'S GO
FOR A RIDE,
J.T.

SURE
THING.





BREEEP

WHAT'S
THE
WORD?

THE PRODUCT
IS EN ROUTE TO
THE CLIENTELE.

EXCELLENT.

HAVE YOUR
MEN WATCH
THE TRANSACTIONS
CLOSELY. WE DON'T
WANT ANY DEVIATION
FROM WHAT WE
DISCUSSED.

AS FOR YOU,
ARE YOU IN POSITION
NOW? I DO NOT WANT
CLARKE OUT OF YOUR
SIGHT FOR A SECOND.
NOT AFTER TODAY'S
FIREWORKS.

NO WORRIES
THERE. WE HAVE
EYES ON, UH, THE
SUBJECT 24/7.

AND?

SHE'S HAVING A
BUSY NIGHT. SPENT
SOME TIME AT THE
25TH PRECINCT.

JUST LEFT HER
APARTMENT WITH HER
BACKPACK. HEADING TO
THE SUBWAY. MUST BE
A SCHOOL NIGHT.

AH, TO SEE HER
DETECTIVE FRIEND, NO
DOUBT. WHAT ELSE?

GOOD.
JUST STAY
ON HER.

LIKE
GLUE.
KEEP IT
THAT WAY.
LATE.

WHAT? WHY'RE
YOU LOOKING AT ME
LIKE THAT? DAMN, IT'S
JUST LIKE MAMA, AND
YOU NEVER EVEN
MET HER.

AND
YET SHE TOLD
YOU TO ALWAYS
LISTEN TO
ME.

AND
DO YOU KNOW
WHY? I'M NOT
CARELESS LIKE
YOU'VE BEEN, ISAAC.
AT SUCH A CRITICAL
JUNCTURE.
IT'S JUST...
UNWISE.

YOU MEAN
THAT JUNKIE
CHICK REPORTIN'
HER MISSIN'
KID?

OH, COME NOW,
BROTHER. SURELY
AN OXFORD-EDUCATED
FELLOW LIKE YOURSELF
DOESN'T NEED TO CARRY
ON WITH THAT STREET
TALK IN HERE.

BUT, YES,
THAT...UNFORTUNATE
INCIDENT IS WHAT I'M
REFERRING TO. AND
THAT MESSY BUSINESS
AT THE HOSPITAL. THE
GODDESS SHOWED HER
DISPLEASURE WITH
YOU, WITH BOTH
OF US.

BUT THE
OLD MAN WAS
STARTING TO HAVE
DOUBTS. IT WAS JUST
A MATTER OF TIME
BEFORE HE WENT
TO THE POL--

--NOT FERNANDO.
YES, HE NEEDED
TO BE REPLACED.
BUT THE OFFERING
YOU USED TO GAIN
CONTROL OVER
RAYMUNDEZ...
THE BOY HAD A
FAMILY MEMBER
AWARE OF HIS
WHEREABOUTS.

IF A JUNKIE
MOTHER SO BROKE
THAT SHE'S WILLING
TO "RENT" HER SON
FOR PRODUCT COULD
BE CONSIDERED
FAMILY, THEN--

--IT IS NOT
YOUR PLACE TO
JUDGE A MOTHER'S
LOVE FOR HER
SON, ISAAC.

SHE'S FILED A MISSING PERSON'S
REPORT. AND THE DETECTIVES
KNOW HER STORY IS SUSPECT. SHE
WILL CRACK, SOON.

SHE'LL NAME ONE OF
YOUR "BOYS" AS THE ONE
SHE TALKED TO...

...AND PROMISE
UP AND DOWN TO CHECK
RIGHT INTO DETOX...

...IF THE POLICE
WOULD ONLY HELP
FIND HER SON...

...WHO WAS TAKEN
BY THOSE **BAD MEN**
WHO TOOK ADVANTAGE
OF HER DISEASE.

AND
THEY'RE GONNA
BELIEVE HER?

SHE IS A
LOOSE END,
ISAAC...

I'VE ACQUIRED
THE MEANS FOR
YOU TO TAKE THE
NECESSARY STEPS
WITH HER...AFTER
YOUR PENANCE.

"THEN YOU WILL TAKE
CARE OF THIS..."



"SHE WILL SEE THIS AS
HER LAST CHANCE BEFORE
CLEANING HERSELF UP."



"KEEP EYES ON HER AND THAT
PARAMEDIC. I DO NOT WANT
THEIR PATHS COMING ANYWHERE
NEAR EACH OTHER."

"APPARENTLY
SHE'S JUST GONE
TO CLASS."

"YES. NEUROBIOLOGY AT COLUMBIA.
A THREE-HOUR LECTURE."

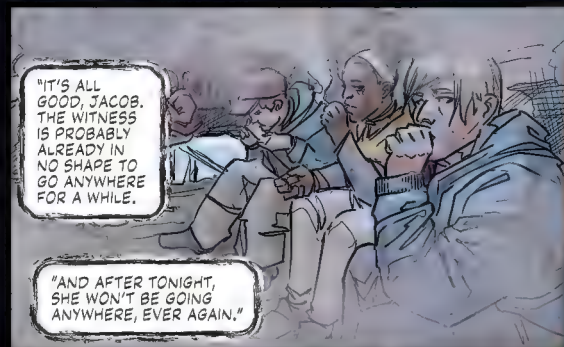


"IT HAD **BETTER**
BE, BECAUSE
FRANKLY I'M
TIRED OF THESE
SURPRISES..."

"THAT SHOULD
BE **MORE** THAN
ENOUGH TIME
TO DEAL WITH
THIS ISSUE."



"...AND SOMETHING
ABOUT THIS NEW
'GIFTED'
CONCERNS ME."



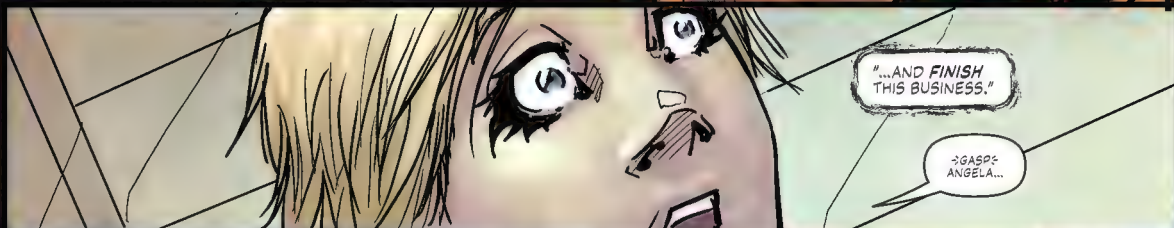
"IT'S ALL
GOOD, JACOB.
THE WITNESS
IS PROBABLY
ALREADY IN
NO SHAPE TO
GO ANYWHERE
FOR A WHILE."

"AND AFTER TONIGHT,
SHE WON'T BE GOING
ANYWHERE, EVER AGAIN."



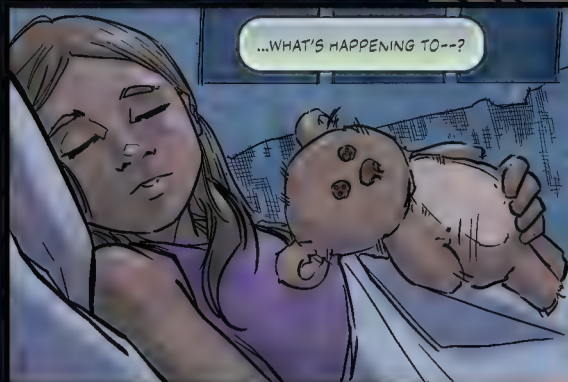
"JUST HOLD OFF ON THE
CELEBRATING UNTIL THE
PROBLEM IS TAKEN CARE
OF. FOR BOTH OUR SAKES."

"NOW MAKE
YOUR TRIBUTE..."

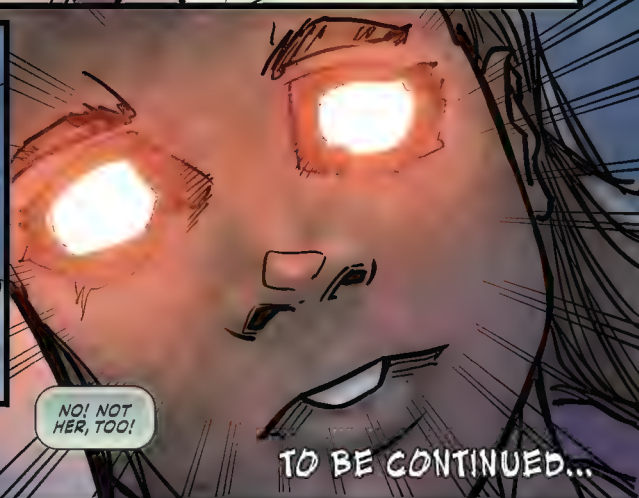


"...AND FINISH
THIS BUSINESS."

~GASPS~
ANGELA...



...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO--?



NO! NOT
HER, TOO!

TO BE CONTINUED...



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COVER A

#3

OF 5

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the Goddesses





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The Goddess Kiss



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LOR. 16
B.T.F.

VOLUME ONE
CHAPTER THREE OF FIVE

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss

PREVIOUSLY:

Several hundred years ago, the worshipers of Oonaa, led by their Priestess, Aamali, lived trouble-free lives in Eastern Africa amongst other tribes until they were sold into slavery by greedy elders who didn't believe in their religion. Becoming slaves in Cuba, Oonaa's servants continued to believe in their Goddess and even gained new worshipers once their fellow slaves saw her power in action when the master of the plantation died a painful death after taking Aamali against her will.

Today, the Goddess still has servants who believe they are acting on her behalf, and some are bestowed gifts of terrible power. Sometimes the power is even given to unknowing people, who then become part of Oonaa's grand design.

Naomi Clarke's doubts about the unexplained phenomenon at the botanica are put to rest, but not in a good way, as she once again manages to save a civilian's life using her unexplained ability for revival. Meanwhile, much like the goddess, Oonaa, a similar evil from the past has begun to return and take shape—and looking to make a few sacrifices of his own.

"Opportunistic Infection"

Created & Written By:

David Wohl

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Colors By:

Wes Hartman

Lettering By:

Zen

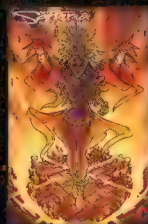
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ON A BRIGHT, CLEAR MORNING, A WEARY CHILD NAMED ISAAC ARRIVED IN THE BUSTLING CITY OF HAVANA, CUBA.

HEEDING HIS MOTHER'S FINAL WORDS TO HIM, ISAAC ENTERED THE HEART OF THE INFERNO AND EMERGED WITH AN INFANT CHILD, WHOM HIS MOTHER HAD CLAIMED WAS THE SON OF THE GODDESS.

ISAAC FOLLOWED AAMALI'S WISHES WITHOUT QUESTION, FLEEING THE DYING PLANTATION WITH HIS NEW BROTHER IN HIS ARMS...

JUST 72 HOURS EARLIER, ISAAC HAD WITNESSED THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER, AMAALI, AT THE HANDS OF THE SPANISH CONSTABULARY.

HARBORING NO FEAR OF DEATH, AAMALI SURRENDERED HER BODY TO THE GODDESS OONAA, WHO EXACTED VENGEANCE ON BEHALF OF HER SERVANT, BURNING THE PLANTATION TO THE GROUND.

...AND BY THE TIME THEY ARRIVED IN HAVANA, THE YOUNG BOY ALREADY SEEMED YEARS OLDER, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO GO AND FEARFUL OF BEING RECAPTURED BY SLAVERS, THE BOYS SOUGHT REFUGE IN A MONASTERY...

...AND IMMEDIATELY PUT TO WORK.

ALTHOUGH THE SENIOR MONKS FEARED RETRIBUTION FOR HARBORING ESCAPED SLAVES, NO ONE EVER CAME LOOKING FOR THE BOYS, AND THEY WERE QUICKLY ACCEPTED BY THE FRIARS.

AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS SEQUESTERED INDOORS, THE MONSIGNOR REQUESTED THEY HEAD OUTSIDE TO PICK UP SUPPLIES FOR HIM.

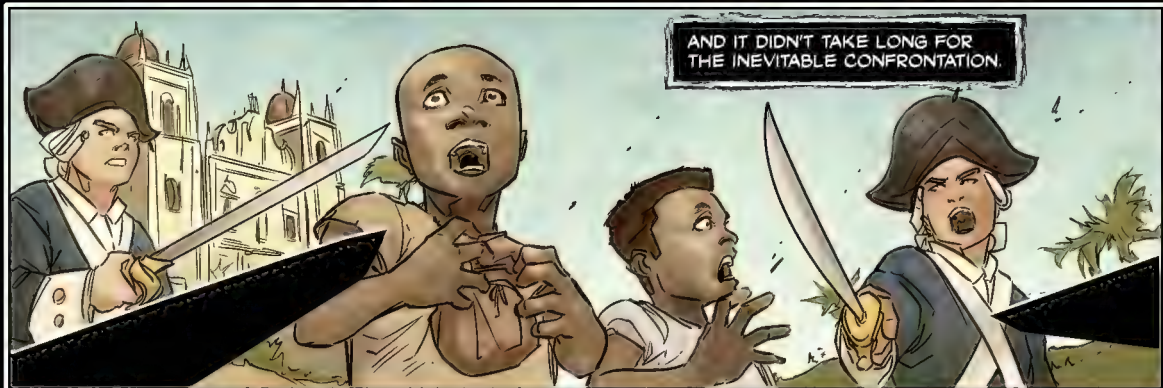
WARY OF CAPTURE, ISAAC PROTESTED, BUT WAS TOLD IT WOULD BE QUITE SAFE FOR THEM NOW.

ISAAC REMAINED UNCONVINCED, BUT DID AS HE WAS TOLD.

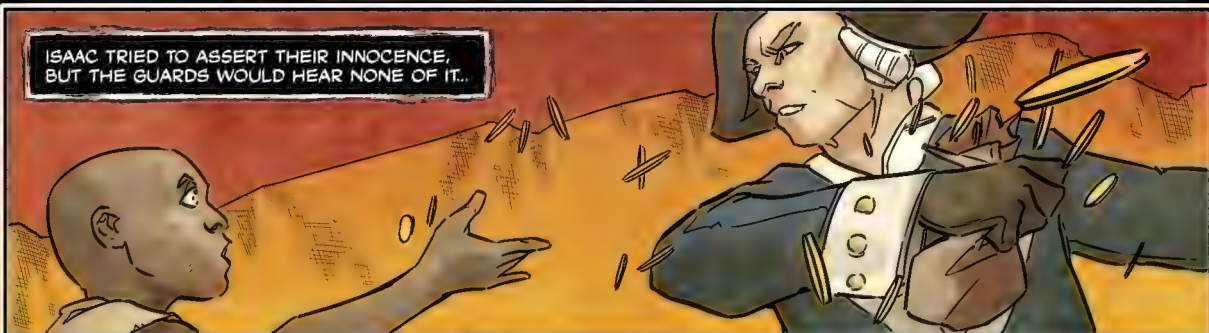
IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR HIS WORST FEARS TO BE REALIZED, AS TWO YOUNG SLAVE BOYS WITH A SACK OF COINS DREW THE ATTENTION OF THE CITY GUARDS.



AND IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE INEVITABLE CONFRONTATION.



ISAAC TRIED TO ASSERT THEIR INNOCENCE, BUT THE GUARDS WOULD HEAR NONE OF IT.



...ESPECIALLY WHEN THE MONSIGNOR WAS SUMMONED, AND RATHER THAN ACKNOWLEDGE THE BOYS' INNOCENCE, HE CONFIRMED THEIR GUILT.



THIS WAS ISAAC'S FIRST TASTE OF BETRAYAL, AND AS COLDNESS ENVELOPED HIM, HE EMBRACED IT, BECAUSE HE KNEW WHAT WOULD COME NEXT.





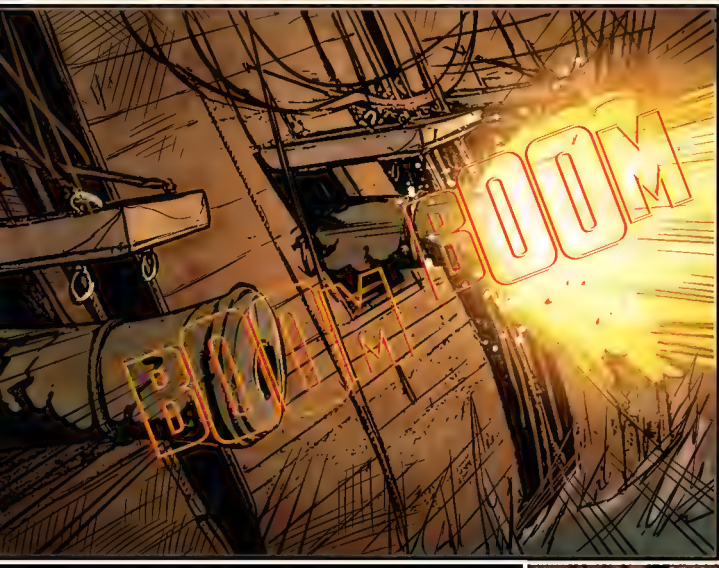
THE BOYS WERE SOLD TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER,
AND HERDED ONTO A SHIP BOUND FOR JAMAICA.



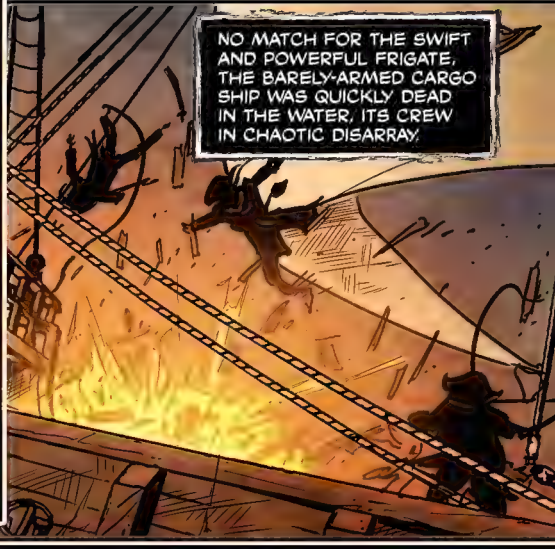
BUT THE SEAS HELD
PERILS OF THEIR OWN...



...AS ENGLISH PRIVATEERS SOUGHT OUT
SPANISH SHIPS TO CRIPPLE AND PLUNDER.



NO MATCH FOR THE SWIFT
AND POWERFUL FRIGATE,
THE BARELY-ARMED CARGO
SHIP WAS QUICKLY DEAD
IN THE WATER, ITS CREW
IN CHAOTIC DISARRAY.

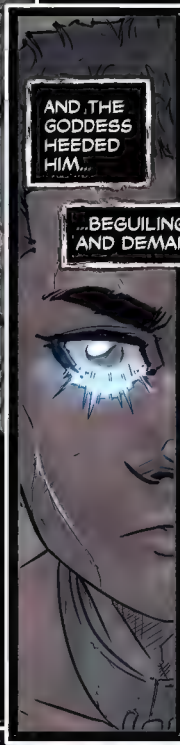




...WHILE BELOW DECK, THE SLAVES (AND THE MORE COWARDLY OF THE CREWMEN) FELT THE SHIP BEGIN TO LIST WILDLY.



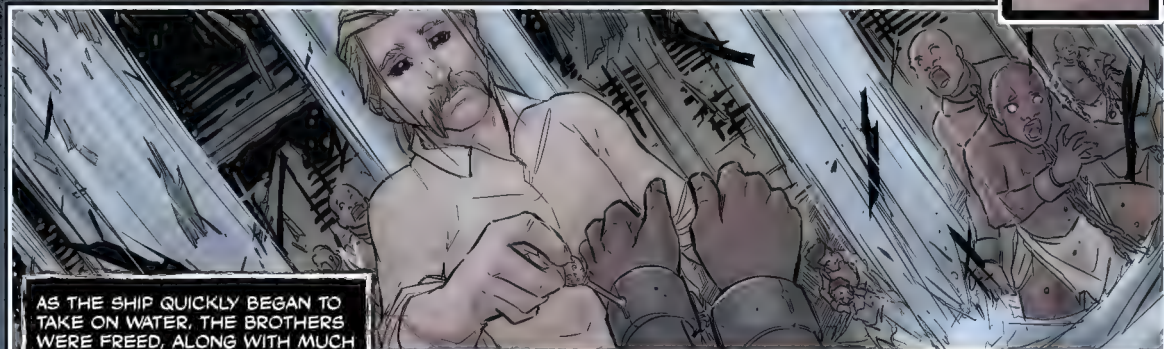
BELIEVING HE HAD JUST SECONDS LEFT ALIVE, ISAAC APOLOGIZED TO HIS MOTHER AND THE GODDESS FOR FAILING THEM.



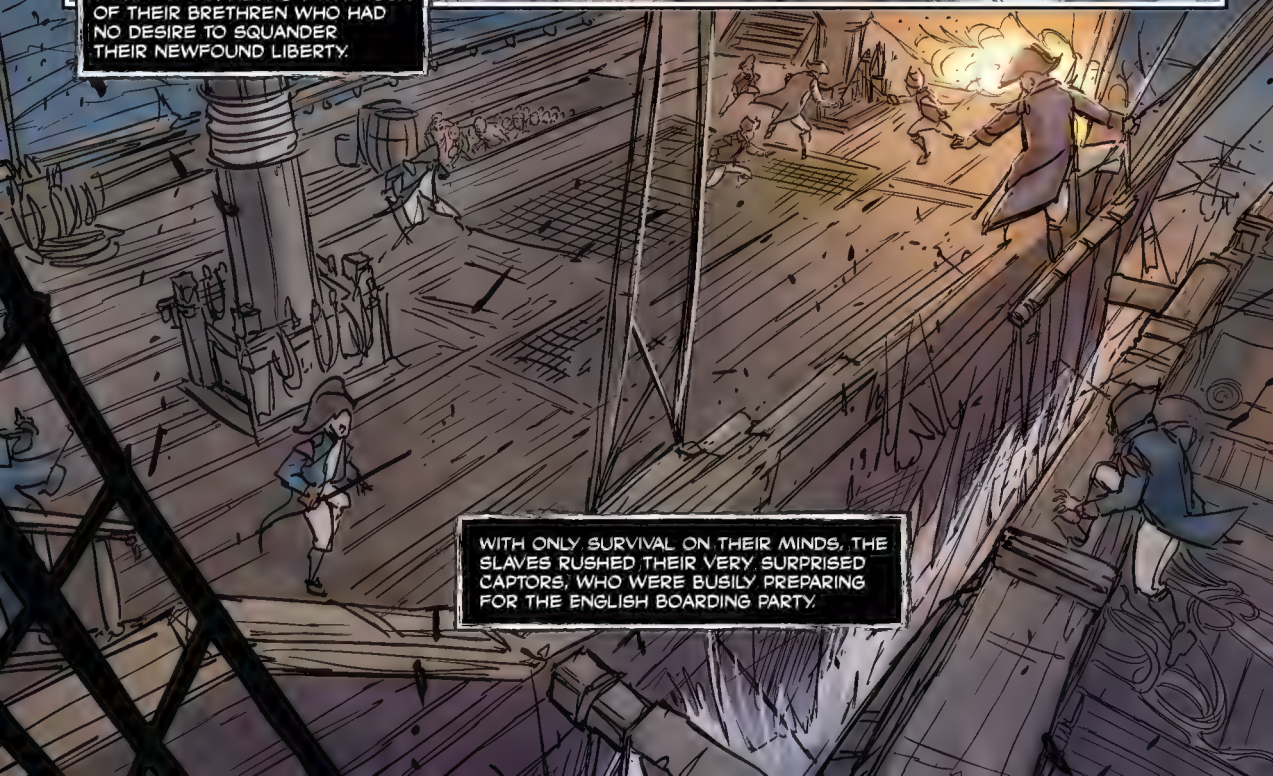
AND THE GODDESS HEEDED HIM...



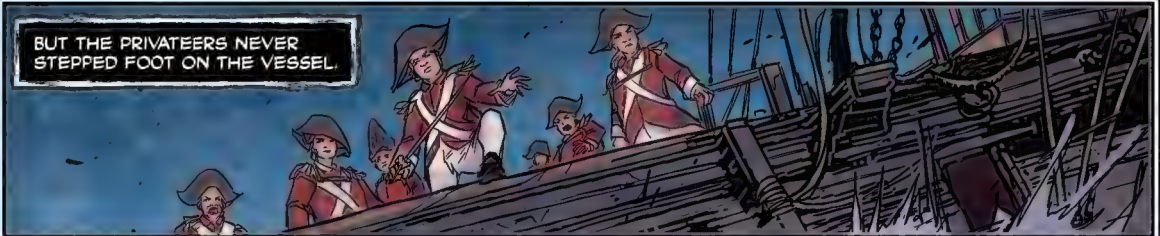
...BEGUILING A SAILOR AND DEMANDING HIS AID.



AS THE SHIP QUICKLY BEGAN TO TAKE ON WATER, THE BROTHERS WERE FREED, ALONG WITH MUCH OF THEIR BRETHREN WHO HAD NO DESIRE TO SQUANDER THEIR NEWFOUND LIBERTY.



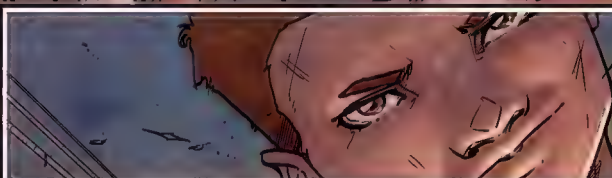
WITH ONLY SURVIVAL ON THEIR MINDS, THE SLAVES RUSHED THEIR VERY SURPRISED CAPTORS, WHO WERE BUSILY PREPARING FOR THE ENGLISH BOARDING PARTY.



BUT THE PRIVATEERS NEVER
STEPPED FOOT ON THE VESSEL.



THEY WERE QUITE
UNNECESSARY.



NOT WHEN A SLAVE INSURRECTION HAD
ALREADY DONE THEIR JOB FOR THEM...



...A REVOLT LED BY A
PREPUBESCENT BOY.

TODAY.

IF ONLY THE GODDESS WAS STILL
SO LOYAL AND PROTECTIVE OF US.

AH WELL, DESPERATE
TIMES AND ALL THAT.

SHE'S COMIN'
OUT, BOSS. JUST
LIKE YOU SAID
SHE WOULD.

DAMMIT,
THIS IS
BAD.

YOU KNOW
WHAT? F@#\$ THIS.
TAKE HER OUT BUT
NO GUNS. MAKE IT
LOOK LIKE A HIT
AND RUN.

YOU HEARD THE
MAN. BUT WHY DO
YOU THINK WE WERE
JUST SUPPOSED TO
WATCH FIRST--?

SHUT UP, ERICK.
JUST KEEP AN
EYE OUT FOR
WITNESSES.

BREEEP

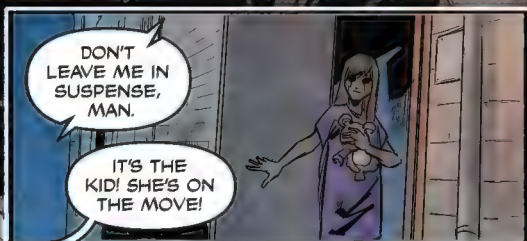
BREEEEEEEP

HEY, DETECTIVE. I'M REALLY
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU
WITH THIS STUFF--
HANG ON. MY
RIDE IS HERE.

SCREEEEEECH

HAPPY TO
HELP, KID. WE
GOT TWO CARS ON
PATROL, WATCHIN' BOTH
OF THE BUILDING EXITS.
NOTHIN' OUT OF THE
ORDINARY YET.

THANKS AGAIN
FOR HUMORING ME,
DETECTIVE. HONESTLY, I DON'T
KNOW WHAT I WAS EXPECTING.
THE KID'S PROBABLY
FAST ASLEEP.





YOU
OKAY,
NAY? YOU
SOUNDED
SPOOKED
ON THE
CALL.

WISH I
KNEW, MIKE.
THIS LAST DAY HAS
ME SERIOUSLY
QUESTIONING
MY SANITY.

I WAS TRYING
TO STAY AWAKE IN
ORGANIC CHEM AND
SUDDENLY I BLACKED
OUT FOR A SEC-AND
THEN I SAW HER.
ANGELA!

THE GIRL
WE SAVED FROM
THE MOB? COULDN'T
IT JUST BE A DREAM?
THAT IS A DULL
SUBJECT.



I WAS
SEEING HER. AT
THAT MOMENT
I KNOW IT!

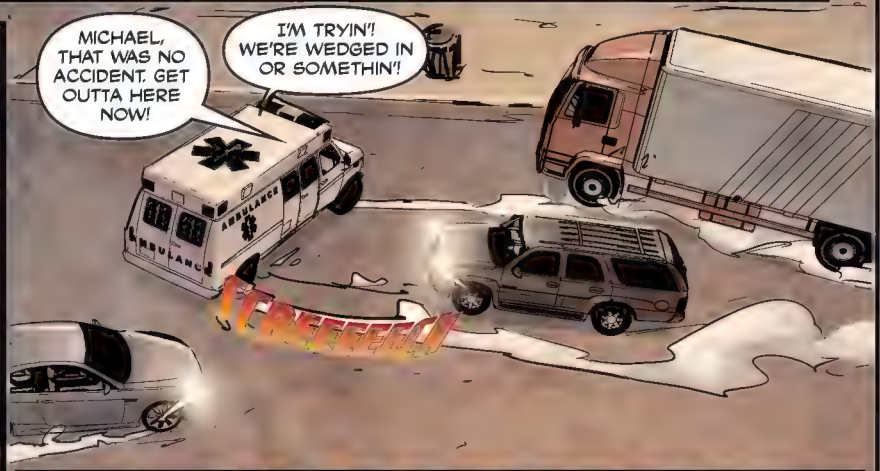
##/s/!!!
HANG ON!
WE'RE
ABOUT TO
GET-



HIT.



GODDAMMED
PUNKS IN THEIR
FOLKS' SUVs.



MICHAEL,
THAT WAS NO
ACCIDENT. GET
OUTTA HERE
NOW!

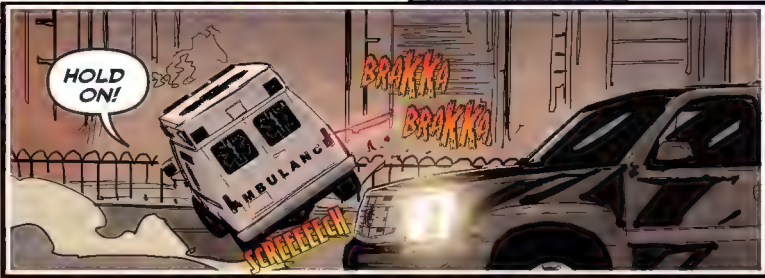
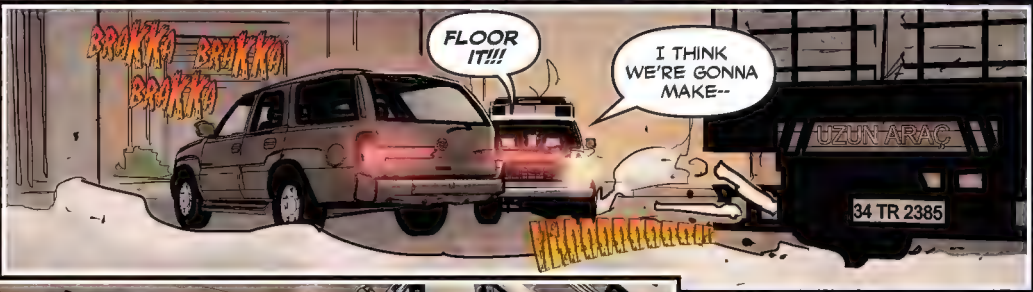
I'M TRYIN'
WE'RE WEDGED IN
OR SOMETHIN'!



MICHAEL!!!

K-CHK

K-CHK





WHAT ARE THESE IDIOTS DOING?!

ANGELA, CAN YOU HEAR ME?



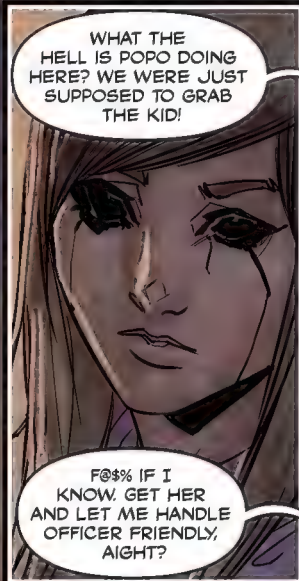
OF COURSE THEY WANT HER. WHY WOULDN'T THEY WANT A GIRL THAT'S FRIGGIN' MAGICALLY POSSESSED?

A FACT I KNOW, OF COURSE, BECAUSE A WOMAN I SORT OF WENT ON A DATE WITH DREAMED ABOUT HER WHILE IN CHEMISTRY CLASS. NOT TOO F8\$\$ED UP?!

DAMMIT! GOTTA FOCUS RIGHT NOW.

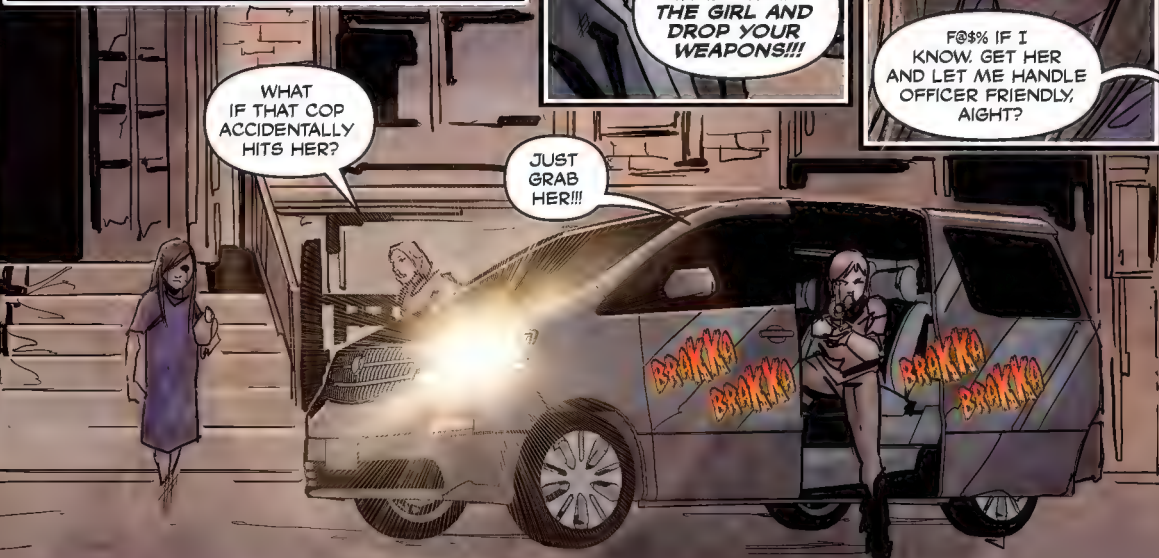


NYPD! STAY AWAY FROM THE GIRL AND DROP YOUR WEAPONS!!!



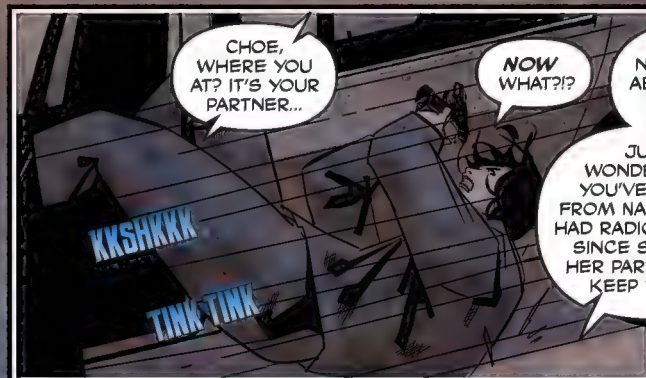
WHAT THE HELL IS POPO DOING HERE? WE WERE JUST SUPPOSED TO GRAB THE KID!

F8\$\$ IF I KNOW. GET HER AND LET ME HANDLE OFFICER FRIENDLY, AIGHT?



WHAT IF THAT COP ACCIDENTALLY HITS HER?

JUST GRAB HER!!!



CHOE, WHERE YOU AT? IT'S YOUR PARTNER...

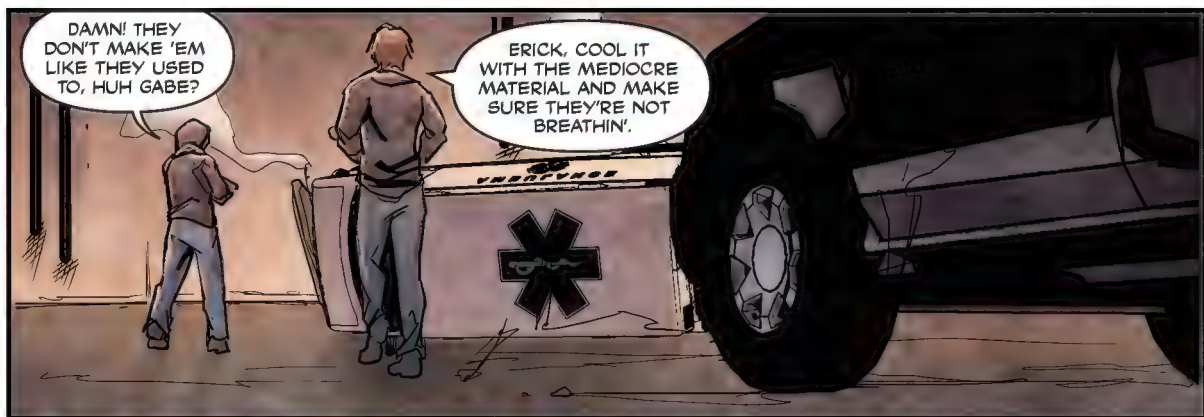
NOW WHAT?!

I'M SURE IT'S NOTHIN' TO WORRY ABOUT, BUDDY. JUST FOCUS ON THE GIRL. HEAR ME?

JUST WONDERIN' IF YOU'VE HEARD FROM NAOMI? I'VE HAD RADIO SILENCE SINCE SHE MET HER PARTNER. I'LL KEEP TRYIN'...



CHOE! YOU THERE?



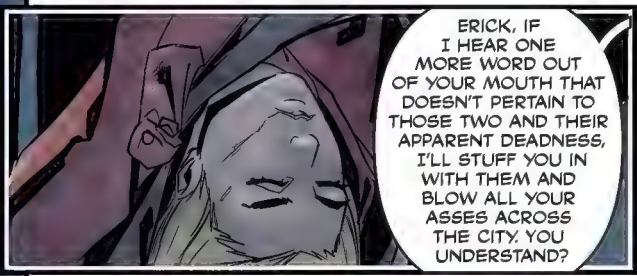
DAMN! THEY
DON'T MAKE 'EM
LIKE THEY USED
TO, HUH GABE?

ERICK, COOL IT
WITH THE MEDIOCRE
MATERIAL AND MAKE
SURE THEY'RE NOT
BREATHIN'.



MEDIOCRE.
AS IF.

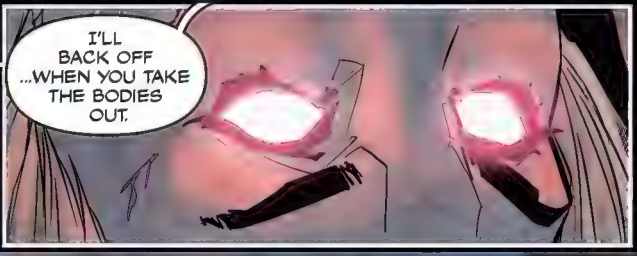
WELL, IT
SEEMS LIKE
SOMEONE GOT UP
ON THE GRUMPY
SIDE OF THE
BED TODAY.



ERICK, IF
I HEAR ONE
MORE WORD OUT
OF YOUR MOUTH THAT
DOESN'T PERTAIN TO
THOSE TWO AND THEIR
APPARENT DEADNESS,
I'LL STUFF YOU IN
WITH THEM AND
BLOW ALL YOUR
ASSES ACROSS
THE CITY. YOU
UNDERSTAND?



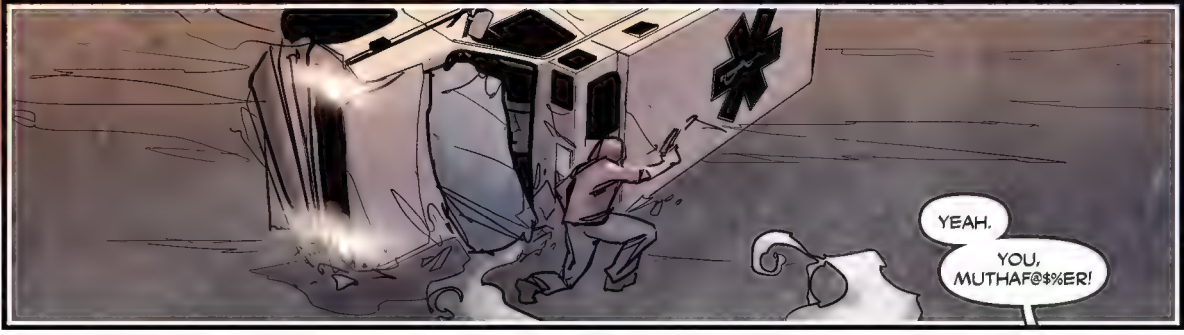
JESUS, CALM
DOWN, GABE.
THEY'RE DEAD.
NOW BACK OFF,
ALL RIGHT?



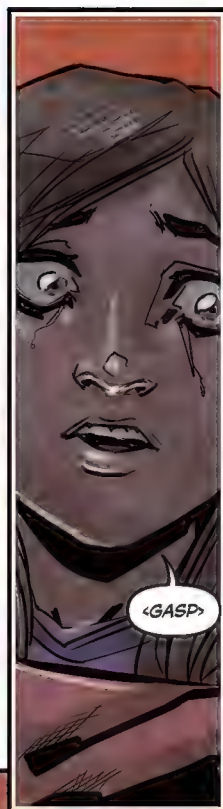
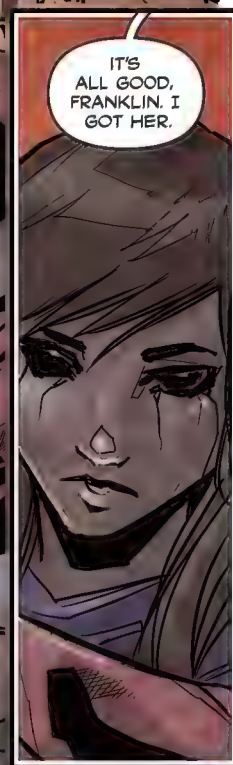
I'LL
BACK OFF
...WHEN YOU TAKE
THE BODIES
OUT.

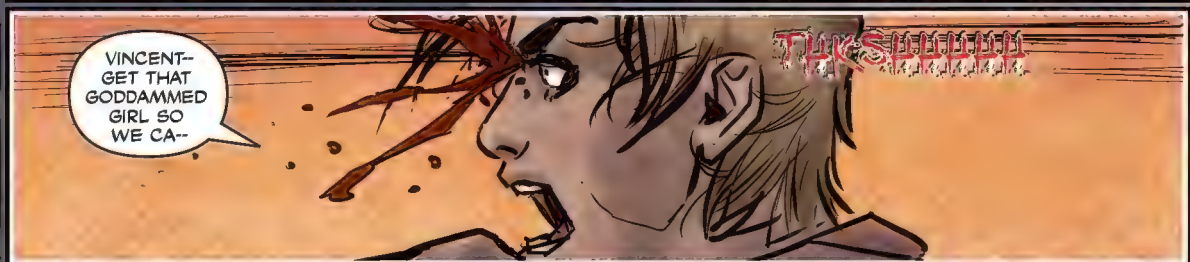


DON'T WE
HAVE SOMEONE
ON THE PAYROLL
WHO CAN DO
THAT FOR US?



YEAH.
YOU,
MUTHAF@\$\$ER!





ELSEWHERE...

I DARESAY THAT I'M A MAN
WHO PRIDES HIMSELF ON
UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE...

WHAT THEY WANT, WHAT THEY
NEED. ULTIMATELY THEY'RE
SO DAMNED PREDICTABLE.

BUT EVERY ONCE IN A
WHILE SOMEONE DOES
SOMETHING ANOMALOUS
THAT SURPRISES EVEN ME.

TAKE THIS WOMAN, KHANDI
MITCHELL, FOR EXAMPLE.

JUST ONE WEEK AGO,
SHE WAS SO DEEP IN
HER ADDICTION THAT
SHE WAS WILLING
TO GIVE UP HER PRE-
TEEN SON FOR A FIX.

BUT THREE DAYS LATER,
SHE APPEARED WILLING
TO CONFESS ALL OF
HER SINS TO THE POLICE
FOR A CHANCE TO GET
HER CHILD BACK.

THEY FAILED TO INVESTIGATE. AFTER ALL,
WHO CARES WHAT A JUNKIE HAS TO SAY.

AND WHEN OUR NEW PRODUCT BECAME
AVAILABLE FREE TO OUR CUSTOMERS,
SHE WAS PREDICTABLY RIGHT THERE,
TOWARD THE FRONT OF THE LINE.

BUT THE BOYS SAY SHE
HASN'T TOUCHED THE
STUFF. SHE'S BEEN FAKING.

...OR YOU'RE
ABOUT TO FALL
VICTIM TO A
WORSE FATE...

AH,
MS. MITCHELL. I
IMAGINE YOU'RE
HERE TO SEE
YOUR BOY...

SADLY
FOR HER,
THERE'S
NO FAKING
WITH *THIS*
PRODUCT.
YOU'RE
EITHER
STRUCK...





OPEN THE
GODDAMMED
DOOR!!!!

PLEEEEEEEEEAAHHHH!!!!

IF YOU ONLY
KNEW THE BAD
THINGS I LIKE...DON'T
THINK THAT I CAN
EXPLAIN IT...

LOOKS
LIKE THE
BOSS' BEEN
UP TO SOME
WEIRD \$\$\$
AGAIN.

...WHAT CAN I
SAY, IT'S COMPLICATED.
DON'T MATTER WHAT YOU
SAY, DON'T MATTER WHAT
YOU DO, I ONLY WANT
TO DO BAD THINGS
TO YOU...

WE BETTER
ROLL BEFORE
HE TURNS IT
ON US!

IT APPEARS THAT OUR YOUNG
PARAMEDIC HAS GARNERED THE
GODDESS' ATTENTION AGAIN.

IN HER DEFENSE,
IF THOSE WITLESS
MINIONS OF YOURS
WOULD'VE JUST
DONE AS TOLD, IT
LIKELY WOULD HAVE
NEVER OCCURRED.



<YOU SHOULD HAVE HEEDED YOUR FOOLISH MASTERS AND REMAINED WITH THE FLOCK.>*

BUT AS MY OLD FRIEND SAID, "YOU PLAY THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT. I THINK THE **GAME'S** WORTHWHILE."

*EDITOR'S NOTE: TRANSLATED FROM YORUBA



AND THIS PARTICULAR GAME IS FAR FROM OVER.

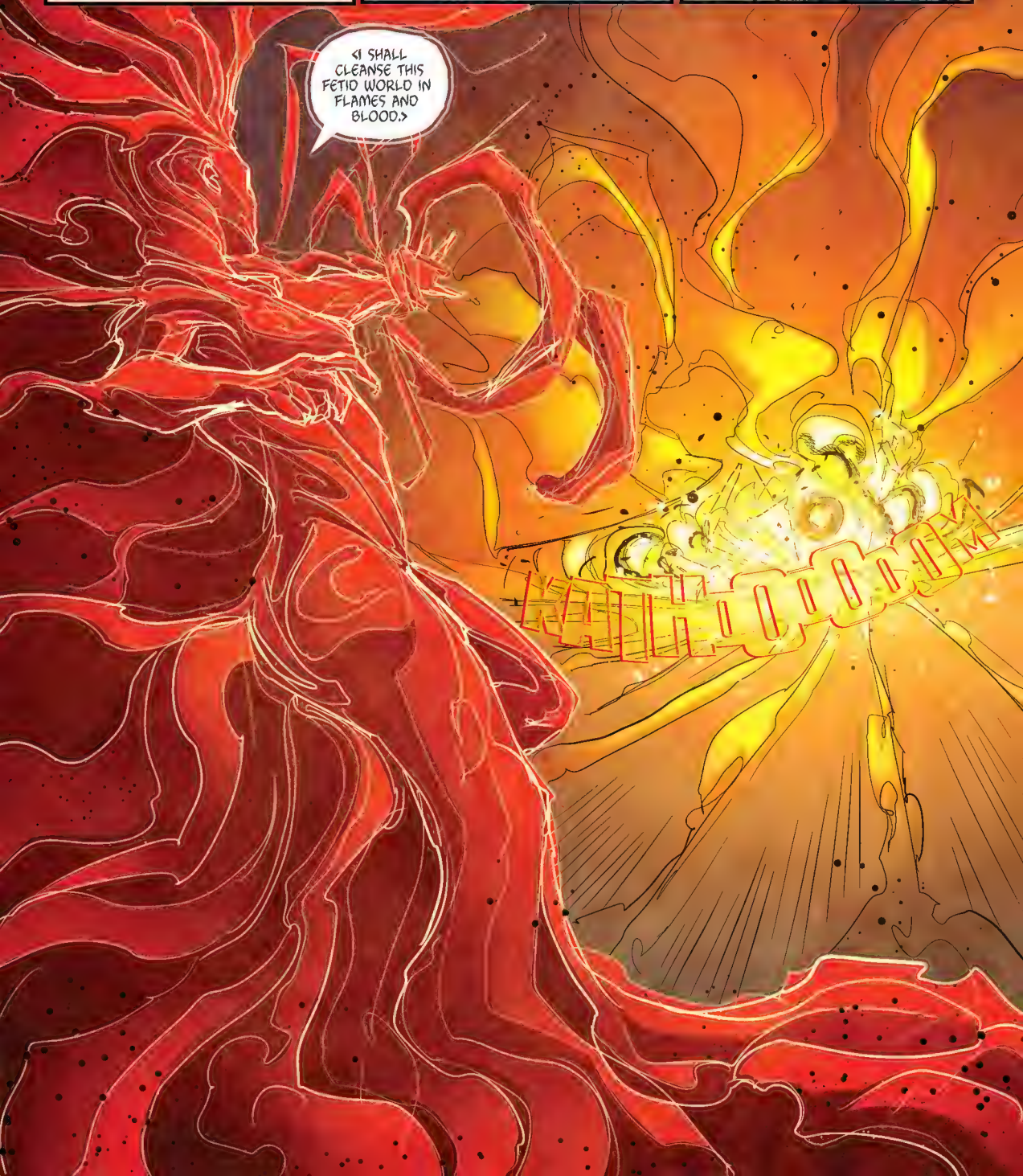
OH-HH MY HEAD. YOU OKAY, NAOMI?

<I WISH FOR NO HARM TO BEFALL THIS VESSEL.>



NAOMI! THANK GOD YOU'RE--

<THOSE WHO DEFY MY WISHES SHALL FORFEIT THEIR LIVES.>



<I SHALL CLEANSE THIS FETID WORLD IN FLAMES AND BLOOD.>

<ONLY THEN,
MY CHILD, CAN
WE TRULY RULE
AGAIN...>

<...HAND IN
HAND...>

<...UNTIL
THE END OF
TIME.>

<AH...BUT
WHO IS THIS?
YOUR MATE?>

<A DECENT
SPECIMEN. NOT
QUITE AS BEFOULED
AS MOST OF THE
MEN WHO INHABIT
THIS PLACE.>

YOU ALL
RIGHT, DOC? HIT
YOUR HEAD OR
SOMETHING?

SHHHH. NOW
IS NOT THE TIME FOR
MUNDANE WORDS. JUST
ENJOY THE SENSUAL
PLEASURES OF THIS
PARADISE.

MMMM...YES...
I SEE WHY SHE
IS FOND OF YOU.
SO STRONG...

WHOA! MAYBE I
HIT **MY** HEAD! ARE
YOU SEEING THIS?
GUESS NOT. WHY
WOULD--

OW!

...YET STILL
POSSESSING THE
FRAGILE FLESH OF
YOUR KIND.

WHAT'D
YOU DO THAT
FOR?

BECAUSE,
LITTLE ONE,
I WANTED A
TASTE.

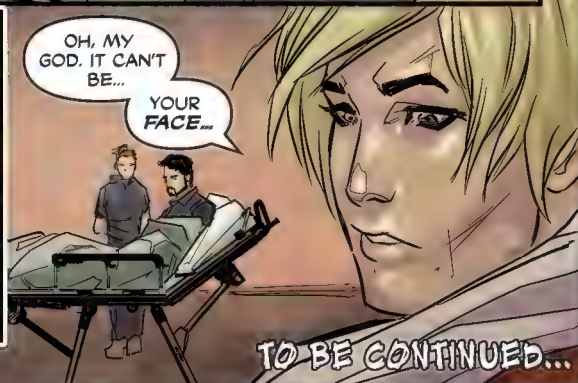
OH.

NOW
YOU ARE
PART OF
ME.

FOR
ETERNITY.

BUT...I
HAVE OTHER
OBLIGATIONS
THAT MUST BE
FULFILLED...

...SO THE
CONSUMMATION
OF OUR UNION
MUST WAIT...





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VOLUME ONE
CHAPTER FOUR OF FIVE

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss

PREVIOUSLY:

Several hundred years ago, the worshipers of Oonaa, led by their Priestess, Aamali, lived trouble-free lives in Eastern Africa amongst other tribes until they were sold into slavery by greedy elders who didn't believe in their religion. Becoming slaves in Cuba, Oonaa's servants continued to believe in their Goddess and even gained new worshipers once their fellow slaves saw her power in action when the master of the plantation died a painful death after taking Aamali against her will.

Today, the Goddess still has servants who believe they are acting on her behalf, and some are bestowed gifts of terrible power. Sometimes the power is even given to unknowing people, who then become part of Oonaa's grand design.

Naomi and Michael's ambulance was ambushed, but before the pair was put to death by gunshot, Oonaa's spirit inhabited Naomi's body—unleashing the fiery essence of her power on their unsuspecting assailants. Naomi later awoke in the hospital beside Michael, as she discovered that the events unfolding around her are not part of a bad dream, but rather her current reality...

"The Other Side"

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YOU KNOW, I OFTEN WONDER WHAT MY BROTHER WAS CONTEMPLATING AS HE GAZED OUT UPON THE VAST ATLANTIC OCEAN.

NOT LONG AGO, HIS INNOCENT CHILDHOOD IN EAST AFRICA WAS RENT ASUNDER WHEN HIS TRIBE'S CHIEFTAIN SOLD ISAAC, HIS MOTHER, AND MORE THAN HALF THE TRIBE TO A SUGAR PLANTATION IN CUBA.

LAND!
I SEE
LAND!*

*EDITOR'S NOTE:
TRANSLATED
FROM YORUBA

AND ONE MUST REMEMBER
THESE OLD GODS ARE A BIT MORE...
VISCERAL, SHALL WE SAY, THAN
YOUR NEWER WESTERN DEITIES.

PERHAPS "INNOCENT" ISN'T QUITE
ACCURATE, SINCE ISAAC WAS THE SON
OF AAMALI, THE HIGH PRIESTESS OF
THE GODDESS NAMED OONAA.

WHEN *YOUR* PEOPLE SAY "SACRIFICE," FOR
EXAMPLE, THEY MEAN THAT WITH HARD WORK AND
DEVOTION, ONE MIGHT GET CLOSER TO GOD.

WHEN WE SAY IT, WE LITERALLY
MEAN A BLOOD SACRIFICE WILL
PLEASE OUR INSATIABLY THIRSTY
GODDESS, WHO WILL SHOW HER
GRATITUDE IN A VERY APPARENT
(AND LIKELY VIOLENT) WAY.

ALTHOUGH THE CREW WERE NOT FANS OF THIS DIVERSION
AT FIRST, A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR THE GODDESS, COMBINED
WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF EXOTIC PLUNDER, MADE THEM
WILLING PARTICIPANTS UPON ARRIVAL.

SO, WHILE ISAAC (AND I)
REMAINED ON THE SHIP TO AVOID
RECOGNITION, THE CAPTAIN AND HIS
OFFICERS DISGUISED THEMSELVES
AS BLACK MARKET SLAVERS AND
MET THE CHIEFTAIN.

ACCUSED OF HERESY
AND PUT TO DEATH,
AAMALI'S SELF-SACRIFICE
TO THE GODDESS WAS
HONORED BY OONAA
INCINERATING THE
PLANTATION AND ALL ITS
OCCUPANTS, SAVE
THE SLAVES...

SHE CONTINUED TO WATCH OVER
AAMALI'S BOYS UNTIL HER POWER
WAS ALL, BUT DEPLETED. AT THAT
POINT, SHE INSISTED THEY TELL
THEIR HOSTS TO IMMEDIATELY
SAIL FOR EAST AFRICA...

ECSTATIC, THE OLD MAN
TOLD THE FOREIGNERS
THEY COULD TAKE THEIR
PICK AFTER THEY SPENT
THE NIGHT AS HIS GUESTS.

HOME...

HOURS LATER, THE VILLAGE
QUIET WITH SLEEP, OUR
REMAINING CREW BEGAN TO
ARRIVE, WEAPONS IN HAND.

WITH NO GUARD IN SIGHT, WE
STRUCK SWIFTLY, ELIMINATING
ANYONE WHO SEEMED EVEN
MILDLY THREATENING, IN THE GRISLY
WAYS THE GODDESS PREFERRED.



THE MEN WERE
CAREFUL NOT TO HARM
THE CHIEFTAIN OR HIS
KIN, AS THE GODDESS
REQUESTED.



AND AS HE LOOKED
UPON HIS VILLAGE IN
RUIN, ITS SLAUGHTERED
PEOPLE PILED AROUND
HIM, HE COULD ONLY
ASK ONE QUESTION:

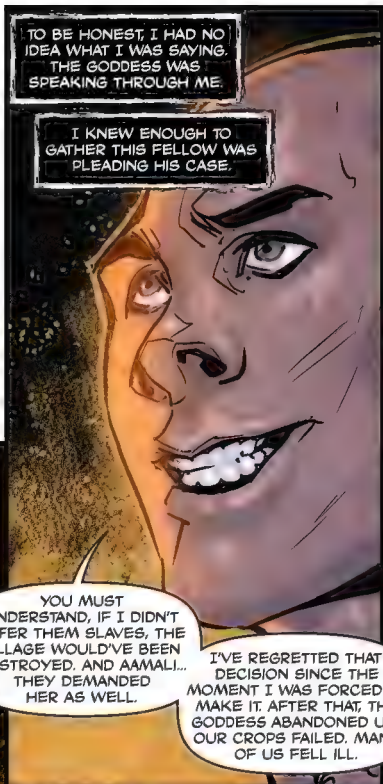
WHY?



YOU...



I NOTIFIED HIM THAT HE WAS
GUILTY OF ABUSING HIS
POSITION FOR PERSONAL GAIN,
FOR TURNING HIS BACK ON HIS
PEOPLE, HIS RELIGION, AND
WORST OF ALL, HIS GODDESS.



TO BE HONEST, I HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WAS SAYING. THE GODDESS WAS SPEAKING THROUGH ME.

I KNEW ENOUGH TO GATHER THIS FELLOW WAS PLEADING HIS CASE.

YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, IF I DIDN'T OFFER THEM SLAVES, THE VILLAGE WOULD'VE BEEN DESTROYED. AND AAMALI... THEY DEMANDED HER AS WELL.

I'VE REGRETTED THAT DECISION SINCE THE MOMENT I WAS FORCED TO MAKE IT. AFTER THAT, THE GODDESS ABANDONED US, OUR CROPS FAILED. MANY OF US FELL ILL.



AND NOW THE GODDESS HAS RETURNED...



...TO RENDER JUDGMENT.



PLEASE... I ONLY DID WHAT I THOUGHT WAS BEST FOR MY PEOPLE.

YOU... HAVE NO PEOPLE. YOU HAVE NOTHING.



EARTHLY POWER IS AS FLEETING AS A BREEZE.

BUT BLOOD...



...THAT HOLDS TRUE POWER!

BRING HER!

NOW, MY BROTHER WAS NO STRANGER TO SACRIFICES, BUT THE LAST TIME HE WAS HERE, THE GODDESS WAS SATISFIED WITH CHICKENS.

AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THIS WASN'T JUST SOME ANONYMOUS HUMAN. THIS WAS THE DAUGHTER OF THE CHIEF WHOM ISAAC HAD KNOWN SINCE THE DAY SHE WAS BORN.

NO!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
NO!

I'VE OFTEN WONDERED IF THIS WAS A TEST OF ISAAC'S LOYALTY AS MUCH AS ANYTHING ELSE...

ISAAC, I KNOW YOU REMEMBER--

HUSH, DARLING. I AM GIVING YOU A VERY PRECIOUS GIFT.

IT IS TIME, MY CHILDO, TO GIVE THE GIFT.

I'VE DONE NOTHING! THIS ISN'T FAIR! FATHER, PLEASE!

I'M SORRY.

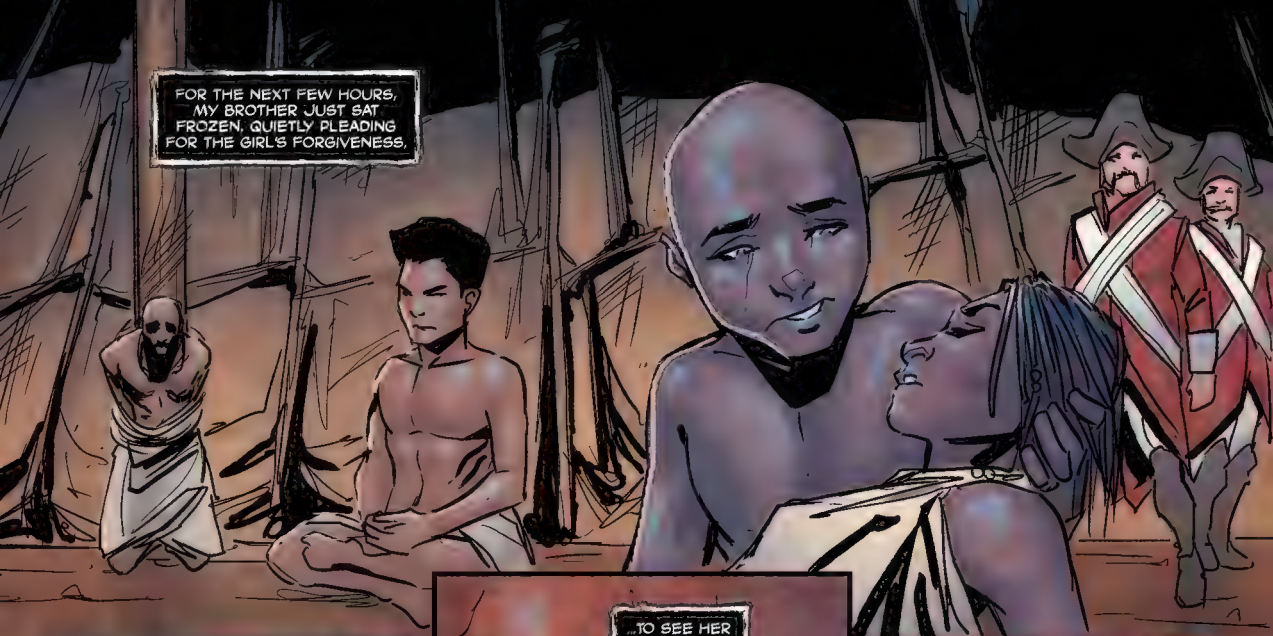
I'M SORRY.

YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW THIS, BOY.

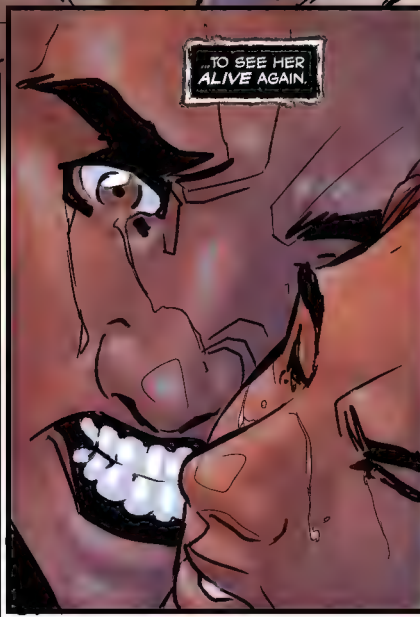
PLEASE... YOU DON'T NEED TO KILL HER. THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY! TAKE ME! THIS IS ALL MY FAULT!

SKKILLSSHH

FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS,
MY BROTHER JUST SAT
FROZEN, QUIETLY PLEADING
FOR THE GIRL'S FORGIVENESS.



...TO SEE HER
ALIVE AGAIN.



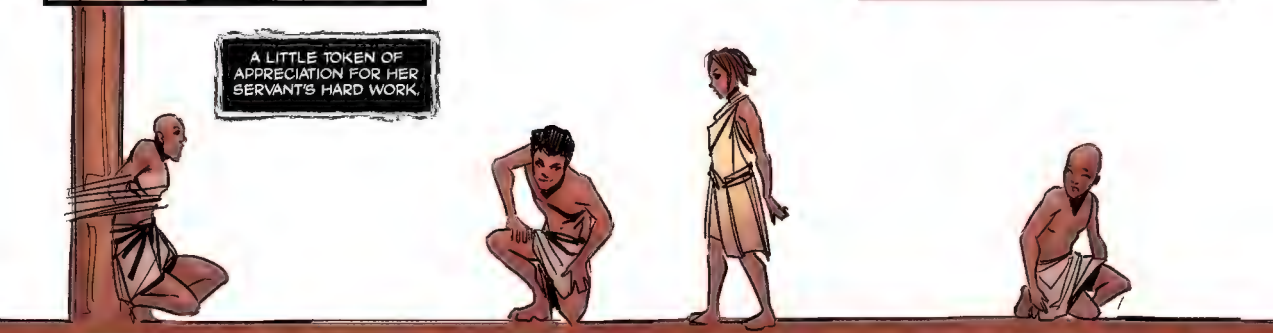
HIS DESPERATION WAS TANGIBLE AND
OVERWHELMING. HE WOULD DO ANYTHING
TO TAKE BACK WHAT WAS DONE...



ALTHOUGH I SEVERELY
DOUBT THAT HIS PLEAS
WERE INTENDED FOR THE
GODDESS, IT WAS SHE
WHO HEEDED THEM.



A LITTLE TOKEN OF
APPRECIATION FOR HER
SERVANT'S HARD WORK.



AND, LIKE ALL OF
THE GODDESS' GIFTS...



...IT CAME WITH ITS
OWN DISTINCT COST.



BUT THAT WAS
MANY YEARS AGO...

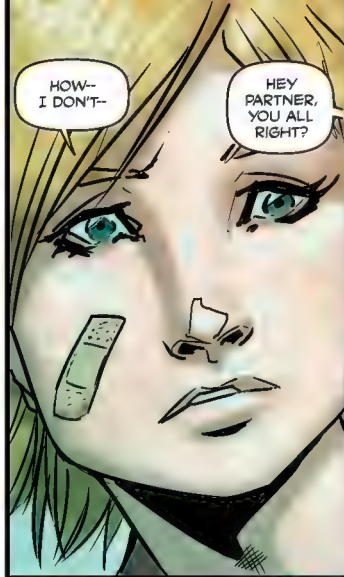
...MANY
SACRIFICES
AGO.

I'M SURE TO SOMEONE LIKE
YOURSELF, MY BROTHER'S ACTIONS
OF LATE MUST APPEAR **BARBARIC**.

I ADMIT, EVEN I
AM TAKEN ABACK BY
WHAT SHE'S TURNED
US INTO.

WHICH LEADS
ME TO WONDER...

WHAT DO *YOU*
INTEND TO DO ABOUT
IT, MS. CLARKE?



HOW--
I DON'T--

HEY
PARTNER,
YOU ALL
RIGHT?



YOU WANT ME
TO CALL THE NURSE?
THERE'S A **FREE BED**
IN HERE.

NO, I-- SORRY,
MICHAEL. IT'S JUST--
I'VE BEEN HAVING THESE
DREAMS. THEY'RE SO
WEIRD AND SEEM SO
F@#\$ING REAL!



TELL ME
ABOUT IT.



HEY, NAOMI. I
MEANT TO ASK YOU.
DO YOU REMEMBER
WHAT HAPPENED AFTER
THE AMBULANCE
FLIPPED?

I MEAN, ONE
MINUTE WE'RE ABOUT
TO GET **WHACKED** BY
SOME **GANGBANGERS**.
THE NEXT THEY'RE GONE
AND I COULD SWEAR I
HEARD YOU SPEAKING
IN **TONGUES**.



NO IDEA,
PARTNER,
BUT I THANK
GOD WE MADE
IT THROUGH,
RIGHT?

YEAH.
GUESS
SO.

YOU
VISIT THE
KID YET?



LAST I
CHECKED, SHE
WAS ASLEEP. HER MOM
SAYS SHE DOESN'T
REMEMBER LAST
NIGHT AT ALL.

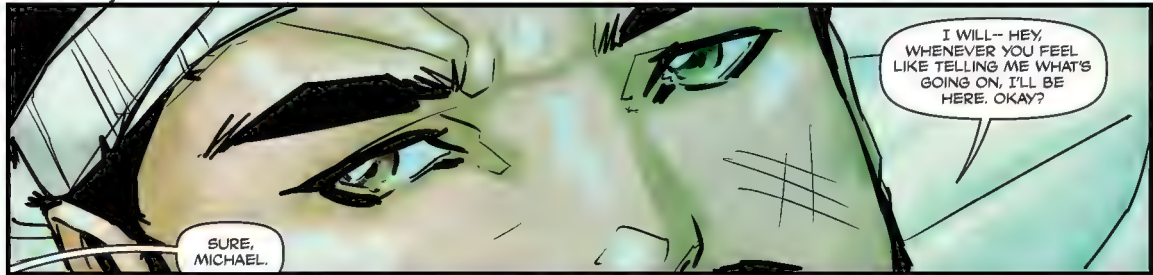
GOIN'
AROUND, I
GUESS.

GUESS SO. HEY, I
GOTTA MEET THE POPO
IN THE CAFETERIA
DOWNSTAIRS. YOU WANT
SOMETHING?



NO, I HEAR THE CHEF
IS MAKING A SPECIAL JELLO
WITH DINNER TONIGHT, AND I
WOULDN'T WANNA FILL UP.

OOKAY,
BUDDY. I'LL BE
BACK LATER. GET
SOME REST, ALL
RIGHT?



I WILL-- HEY,
WHENEVER YOU FEEL
LIKE TELLING ME WHAT'S
GOING ON, I'LL BE
HERE. OKAY?

SURE,
MICHAEL.

SHORTLY...

...THEN HE
TURNS, LOOKS RIGHT
AT ME, AND SAYS (IN
THIS SNOOTY ACCENT
"WHAT DO YOU INTEND
TO DO ABOUT IT,
MS. CLARKE?"



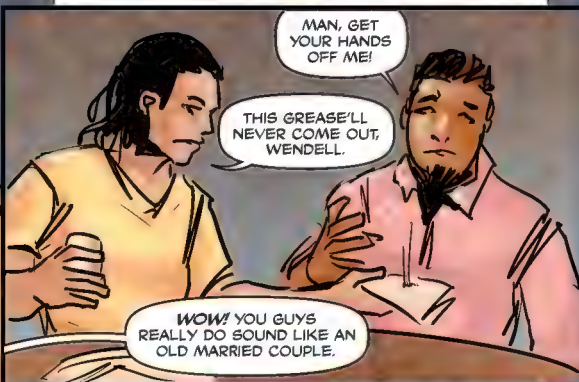
WOW. NOW THAT I'M
SAYING IT OUT LOUD, IT
SOUNDS NUTS. MAYBE I
JUST NEED SLEEP

MMFFT
ID FFUMM
MEFFHSHUFF
TTHHHH

YOU'LL HAVE
TO EXCUSE MY
PARTNER, NAOMI. HE
DID GROW UP IN
A BARN. ONLY ONE
IN THE BRONX,
ACTUALLY.

...IS THAT AFTER
WITNESSING A SERIES
OF SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE
EVENTS, WE BELIEVE WHAT
YOU'RE TELLING US **AND**
HAVE AN IDEA ON WHERE
TO LOOK NEXT.

BUT BEFORE
WE PROCEED, I NEED TO
ASK YOU AN IMPORTANT
QUESTION FIRST.



MAN, GET
YOUR HANDS
OFF ME!

THIS GREASE'LL
NEVER COME OUT,
WENDELL.

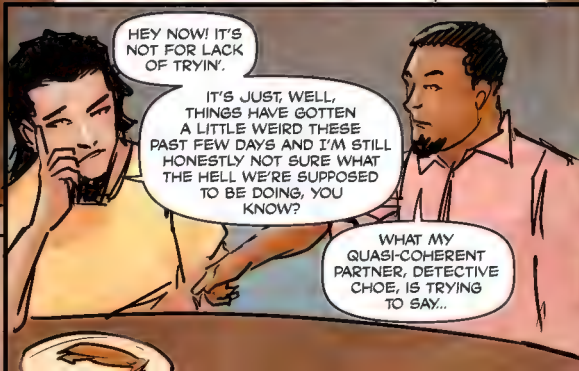
WOW! YOU GUYS
REALLY DO SOUND LIKE AN
OLD MARRIED COUPLE.



YA KNOW, I'M
SUDDENLY HAVING
SECOND THOUGHTS
ABOUT GIVING THE
TWO OF YOU MY
BLESSING.



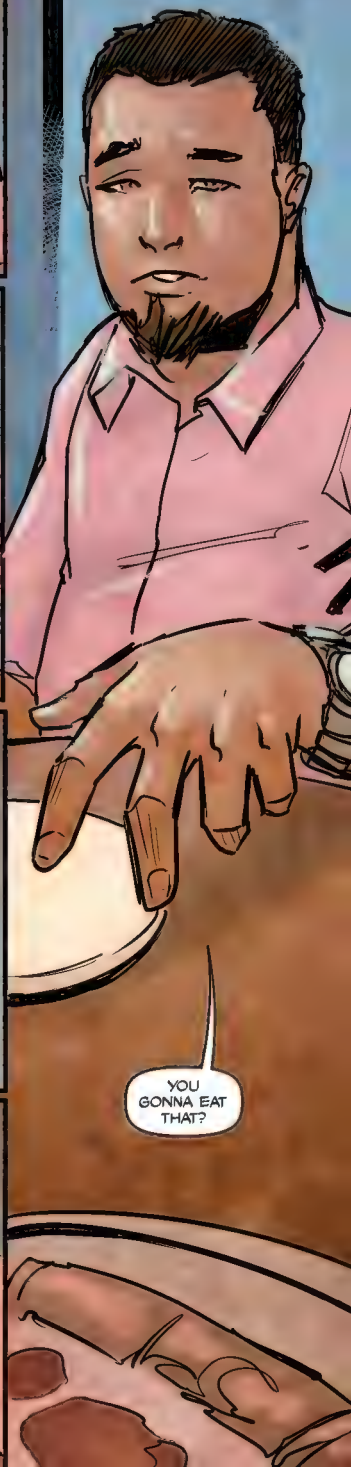
BLESSING?
YOUR PARTNER
HASN'T EVEN MADE
IT THROUGH A CUP
OF COFFEE WITH
ME YET.



HEY NOW! IT'S
NOT FOR LACK
OF TRYIN'.

IT'S JUST, WELL,
THINGS HAVE GOTTEN
A LITTLE WEIRD THESE
PAST FEW DAYS AND I'M STILL
HONESTLY NOT SURE WHAT
THE HELL WE'RE SUPPOSED
TO BE DOING, YOU
KNOW?

WHAT MY
QUASI-COHERENT
PARTNER, DETECTIVE
CHOE, IS TRYING
TO SAY...



YOU
GONNA EAT
THAT?

SEVERAL HOURS LATER...

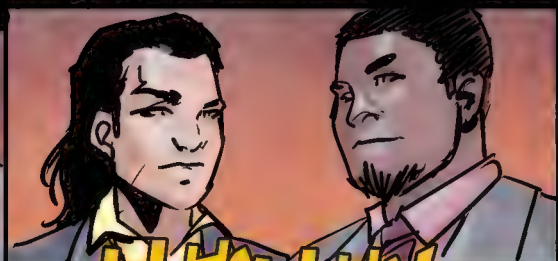
THIS IS IT. WE
WATCHED OVER A HUNDRED
JUNKIES WALK THROUGH THESE
DOORS LAST NIGHT. NONE CAME
OUT. FIGURED THERE MUST'VE
BEEN AN UNDERGROUND
EXIT OR SOMETHING.

LEAST
I HOPE THERE
WAS.

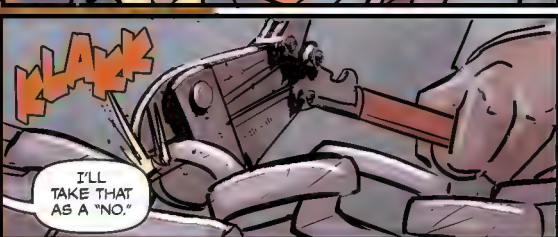
YOU'RE SAYING
THEY ALL DISAPPEARED
AND THE COPS HAVEN'T
INVESTIGATED YET?

NOBODY'S REPORTED
ANYONE MISSING YET AND
SOMEONE'S BEEN KEEPING
THE DETECTIVES BUSY...

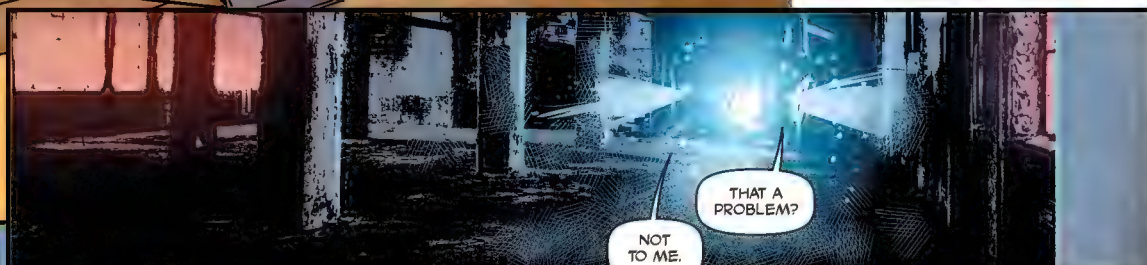
DO WE NEED A
SEARCH WARRANT
OR SOMETHING?



HA HA HA HA!

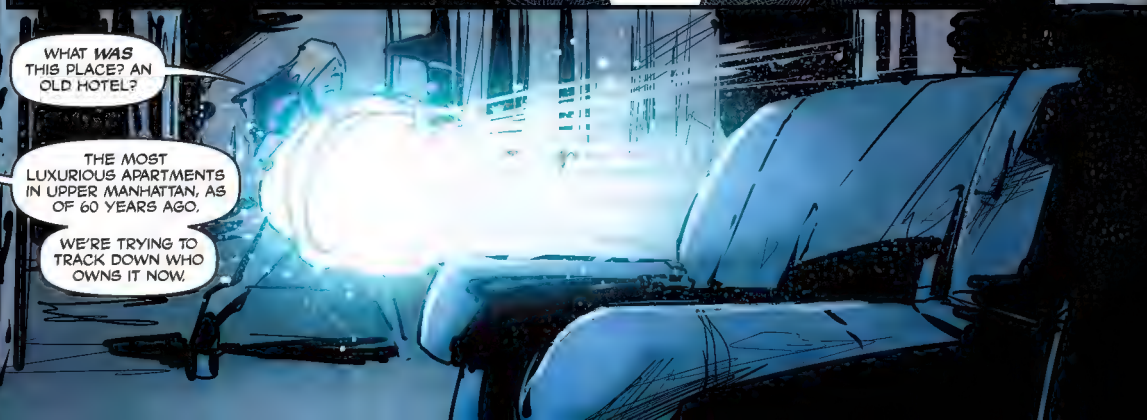


I'LL
TAKE THAT
AS A "NO."



THAT A
PROBLEM?

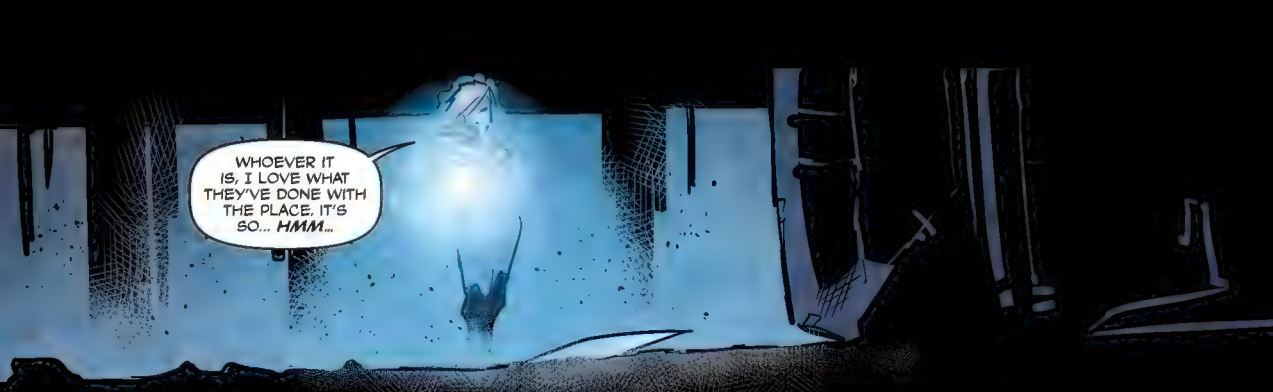
NOT
TO ME.



WHAT WAS
THIS PLACE? AN
OLD HOTEL?

THE MOST
LUXURIOUS APARTMENTS
IN UPPER MANHATTAN, AS
OF 60 YEARS AGO.

WE'RE TRYING TO
TRACK DOWN WHO
OWNS IT NOW.



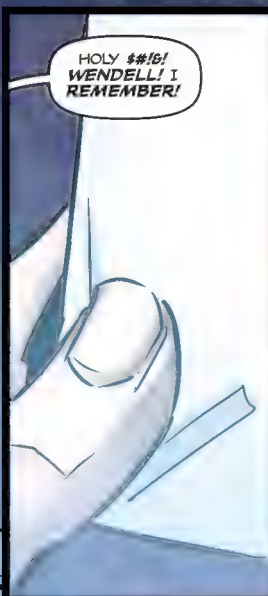
WHOEVER IT IS, I LOVE WHAT THEY'VE DONE WITH THE PLACE. IT'S SO... *HMM*...



GUYS, I FOUND SOMETHING...



...INTERESTING.



HOLY ~~SHIT~~! WENDELL! I REMEMBER!



BACK AT THE STATION... HER NAME WAS *KHANDI*! YOU GAVE HER YOUR CARD AFTER SHE REPORTED HER MISSING SON.

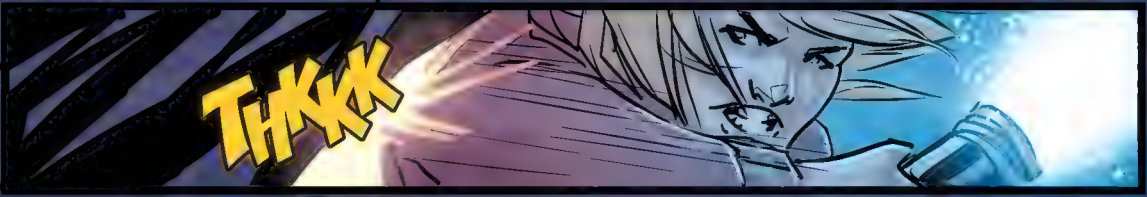


SHE SEEMED GUILTY, LIKE SHE WAS INVOLVED IN HIS DISAPPEARANCE SOMEHOW.



THEN SHE WAS IN THAT ROOM... WITH ALL THAT *BLOOD*...

...KILLED BY THAT MAN--
GASP!



THKKK



HEY-
KOFF-
IT'S ME!

OH, MY
GOD! I'M SO
SORRY!



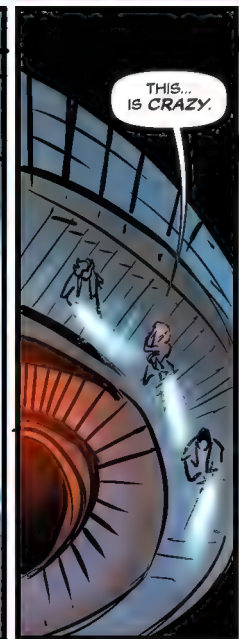
GUYS, YOU
MIGHT WANNA
COME OVER
HERE.



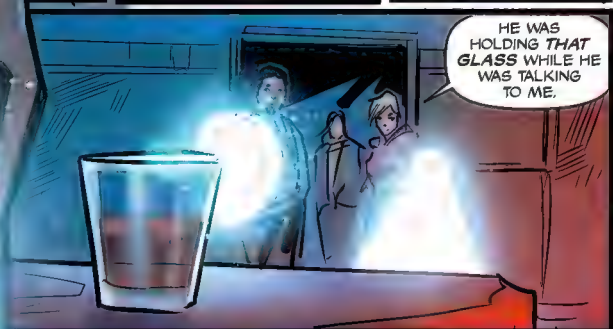
THIS WAS
RECENTLY CLOSED
OFF.



LADIES
FIRST?



THIS...
IS CRAZY.



HE WAS
HOLDING *THAT*
GLASS WHILE HE
WAS TALKING
TO ME.



AND ALL THE
BODIES WERE
RIGHT THERE!



WE GOTTA GET THE
CRIME SCENE GUYS
DOWN HERE ASAP.

AND NAOMI, HERE,
NEEDS A CHANGE OF
CLOTHES, SOMETHING
THAT LOOKS MORE
"OFFICIAL"...





<MY MOST FAITHFUL
SERVANT. WELCOME TO
YOUR NEW HOME.>

<THANK YOU,
GODDESS. I AM YOURS
TO GUIDE.>

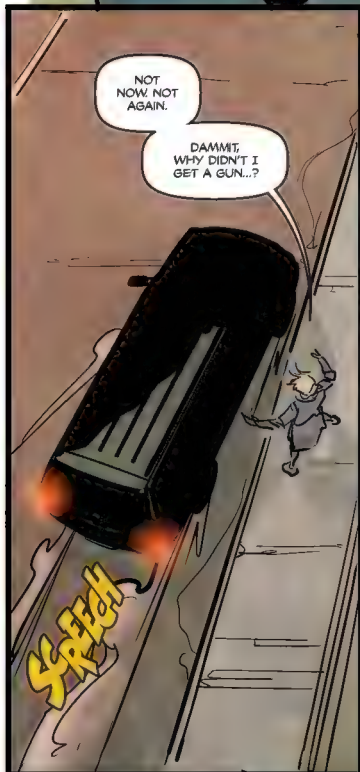
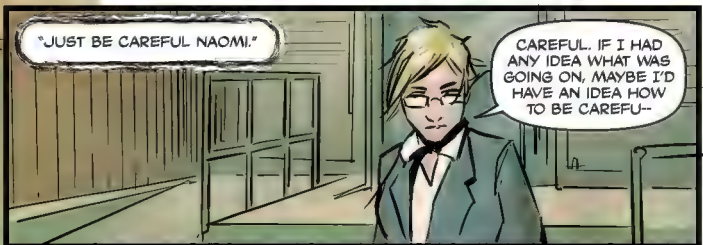
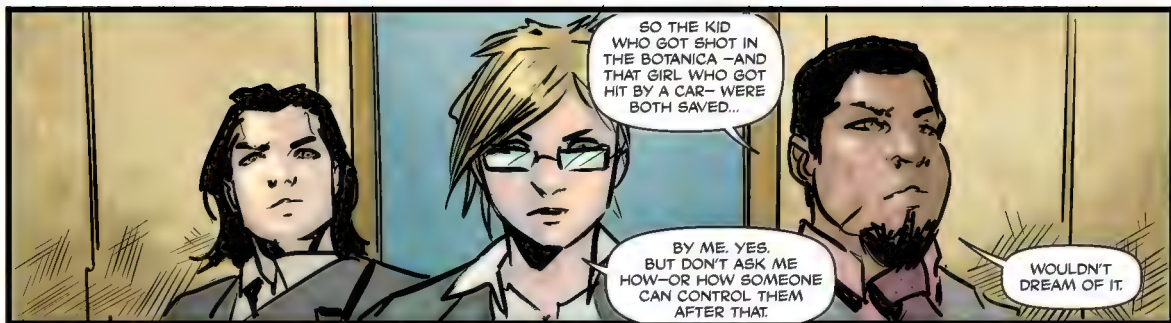
<EXCELLENT.>

<...THEN GAZE
UPON THIS WAYWARD
SOUL, LOST BETWEEN
TWO WORLDS, AND
SHOW HIM THE PATH
TO MY LIGHT.>



SEVERAL MINUTES AND A QUICK WARDROBE CHANGE LATER...







"YOUR PARTNER, MICHAEL, IS IN GRAVE DANGER, MS CLARKE."

"I REMEMBER THIS MAN. HE HELPED SAVE MY LIFE. WHY DOES HE SEEM DIFFERENT THAN EVERYONE ELSE?"

"I BELIEVE THE GODDESS IS TRYING TO USE HIM AS A PAWN TO GET TO YOU."

"YEAH, I NOTICED THE LACK OF LATINOS TOO!"

"I JEST."

"HELLO? TOUGH CROWD."



"YOU ARE QUITE PERCEPTIVE, MY DAUGHTER."

"THIS ONE HAS NOT CROSSED OVER FULLY TO OUR WORLD YET."



"SHE REQUIRES YOUR ASSISTANCE TO DO SO."

"WILL YOU HELP HIM?"

"SHOW ME WHAT I MUST DO."

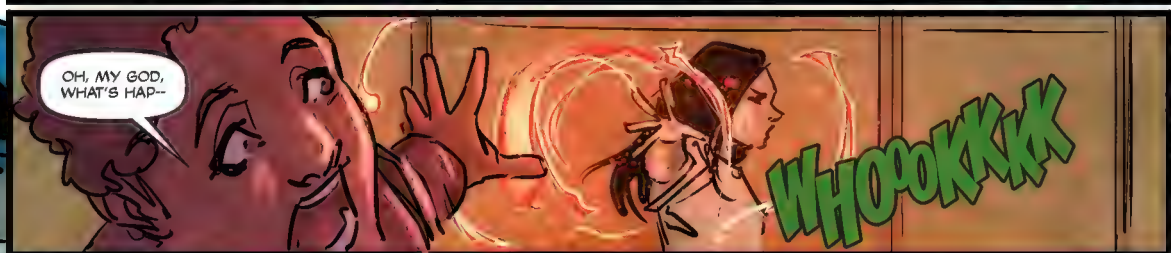
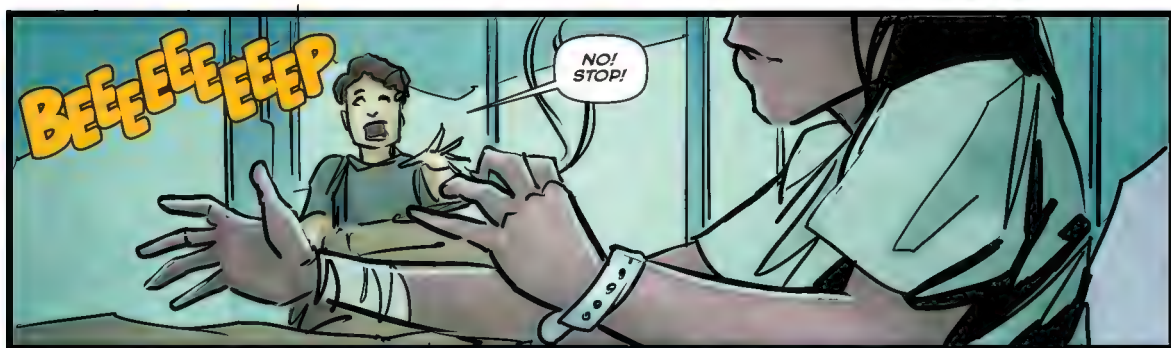
"YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO."

"NOW AWAKEN!"

"HONEY? WHAT IS IT?"

"ARE YOU OKAY?"

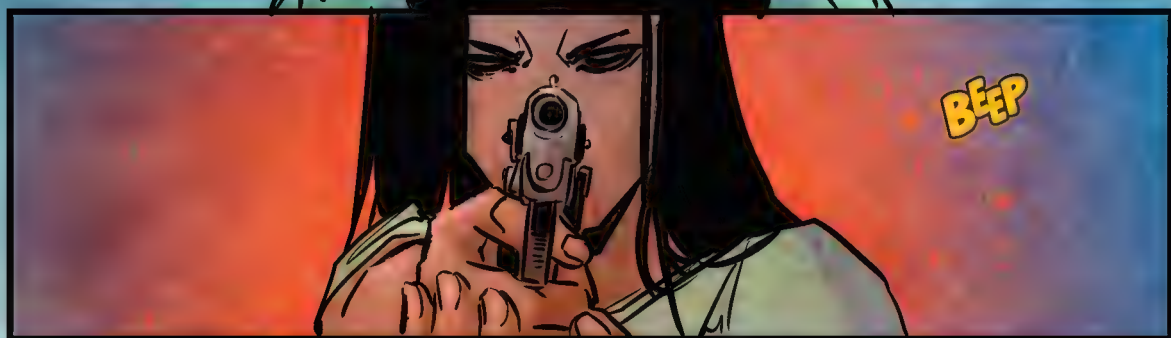
"AND SHE WILL USE THE GIRL, GLORIA, TO DO IT."





BEEP

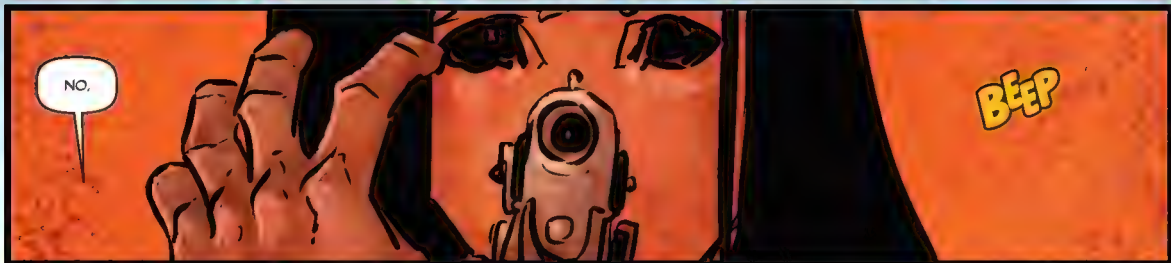
ELIK



BEEP



BEEP



BEEP

NO.

BEEP

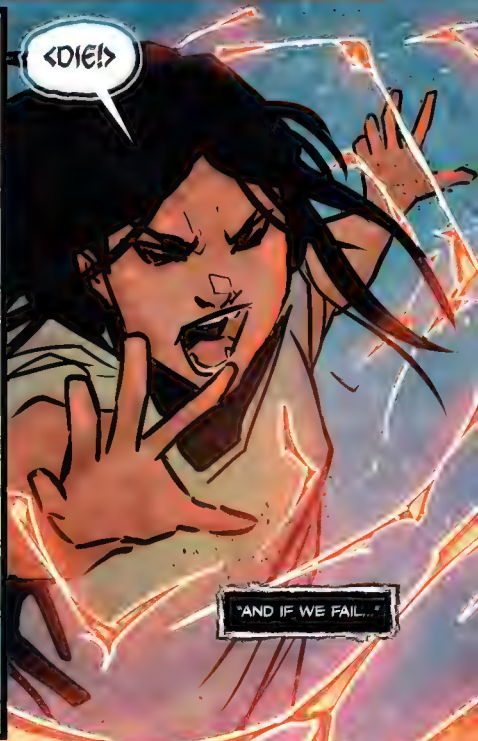
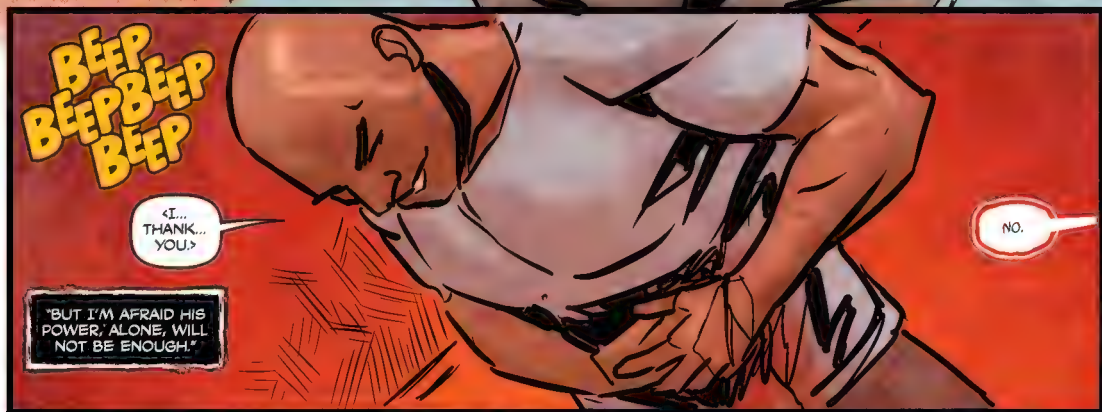


YOU MUST NOT DO THIS!

I <NNGGHH> WON'T LET YOU! <NNGHH>

BEEP
BEEP
BEEP

BLAM
BLAM
BLAM





KERRAAA SHHHHHHH

...THIS WORLD,
SHALL BE DOOMED.

TO BE
CONCLUDED!



VOL. 1
COVER A

#5

OF 5

DAVID WOHL
GIUSEPPE CAFARO
WES HARTMAN
ZEN

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss



WesFlo

VOLUME ONE
CHAPTER FIVE OF FIVE

Santeria

the Goddess Kiss

PREVIOUSLY:

Several hundred years ago, the worshipers of Oonaa, led by their Priestess, Aamali, lived trouble-free lives in Eastern Africa, amongst other tribes until they were sold into slavery by greedy elders who didn't believe in their religion. Becoming slaves in Cuba, Oonaa's servants continued to believe in their Goddess and even gained new worshipers once their fellow slaves saw her power in action when the master of the plantation died a painful death after taking Aamali against her will.

Today, the Goddess still has servants who believe they are acting on her behalf, and some are bestowed gifts of terrible power. Sometimes the power is even given to unknowing people, who then become part of Oonaa's grand design.

Naomi, along with detectives Choe and Wendell, began to piece together the clues that linked the Goddess' work to the victims Naomi's saved with her mysterious and newfound powers. However, the Goddess' machinations were already deep in play, as the young hospital patient Gloria found herself under Oonaa's spell, and on a mission to make Naomi's partner Michael her next sacrifice.

"Kiss of Life"

Created & Written By:

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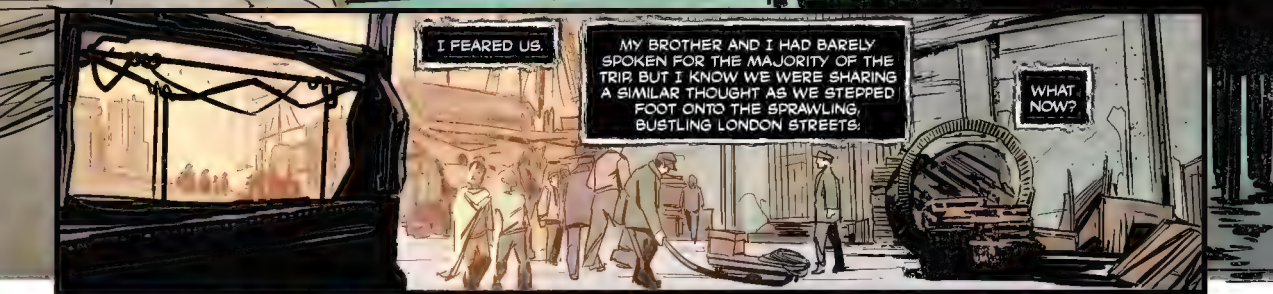
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AFTER OUR EXPLOITS IN AFRICA, THE CAPTAIN SAID IT WAS TIME TO GO HOME, AND NOBODY DISAGREED.

SEEING THE CARNAGE THE GODDESS COULD DELIVER, THROUGH MY BROTHER AND I, WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR THE CREW.

THEY FEARED US.



I FEARED US.

MY BROTHER AND I HAD BARELY SPOKEN FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE TRIP BUT I KNOW WE WERE SHARING A SIMILAR THOUGHT AS WE STEPPED FOOT ONTO THE SPRAWLING, BUSTLING LONDON STREETS.

WHAT NOW?



WE HAD LEFT CUBA AS PAUPERS, BUT WE ARRIVED HERE WITH A SHARE OF THE PRIVATEER'S PLUNDER... MORE MONEY THAN WE'D EVER SEEN.

WE HAD LEARNED ENOUGH ENGLISH ON THE SHIP TO GET BY IN OUR STRANGE, NEW HOME, BUT WE KNEW THAT WE COULDN'T LOOK LIKE SLAVES ANYMORE, IF WE WANTED TO TRULY LIVE HERE.



AS THE STORY OF OUR TRAVELS BEGAN TO CIRCULATE, WE WERE CELEBRATED BY THE ARISTOCRATS OF LONDON, WHO ALL WANTED TO HEAR THE TALES OF THE BOYS WHO ESCAPED A SLAVE PLANTATION AND SURVIVED THE HIGH SEAS TO GAIN FREEDOM IN ENGLAND.



MORE BECAUSE I WAS A CURIOSITY THAN ANYTHING ELSE, THE MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH ROYAL SOCIETY ALLOWED ME TO STUDY IN THEIR LABORATORIES... WITH SUPERVISION.

HERE, I LEARNED THE MOST CURRENT THEORIES OF THE DAY FROM THE WORLD'S MOST PRE-EMINENT SCIENTISTS... A THRILLING AND ENLIGHTENING EXPERIENCE.



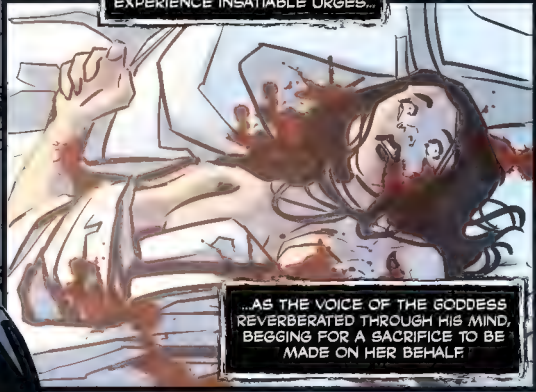
ELSEWHERE, MY
BROTHER EMBARKED ON
THRILLING EXPERIENCES
OF A DIFFERENT SORT



HE HADN'T
RECOVERED
FROM THE
EVENTS IN
AFRICA...

...FROM WHAT
HE FELT THE
GODDESS HAD
FORCED HIM
TO DO.

SINCE THEN, HE HAD BEGUN TO
EXPERIENCE INSATIABLE URGES...



...AS THE VOICE OF THE GODDESS
REVERBERATED THROUGH HIS MIND,
BEGGING FOR A SACRIFICE TO BE
MADE ON HER BEHALF.



WE WERE
THANKFUL FOR
THE GODDESS'
PROTECTION...



...BUT WE WERE ALREADY CERTAIN
HER PRICE WAS MUCH TOO HIGH



WE DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO LEARN ALL WE COULD ABOUT OUR PREDICAMENT, AND COULD THINK OF NO BETTER PLACE TO START THAN ONE OF THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS IN THE KNOWN WORLD, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY.



IT'S TRULY AMAZING HOW FAR YOU CAN GO IF YOU HAVE THE NECESSARY FUNDS... AS I PROVED AS A BOY, GETTING A COLLEGE EDUCATION, WHILE LOOKING NO OLDER THAN TEN YEARS OLD.



AND EVEN AT THIS ESTEEMED INSTITUTION, BOYS CAN LET THEIR BASER INSTINCTS GET THE BEST OF THEM, ESPECIALLY WHEN SHOWN UP BY A CHILD.



AT MOMENTS LIKE THESE, I WAS DEFINITELY PLEASED TO STILL BE UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE GODDESS...

AS WELL AS MY BROTHER.



AS THE YEARS PASSED, I BEGAN TO EXPLORE THE THEOLOGICAL WORLD, BEGINNING WITH THE "OFFICIAL" RELIGION OF OUR NEW HOME.



MY BROTHER DISCOVERED THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER WORLD WITHIN THIS BUSTLING CITY, BUT HIDDEN FROM PLAIN SIGHT.

A WORLD THAT CIVILIZED PEOPLE TURNED A BLIND EYE TO, UNTIL THEY FOUND THEMSELVES IN NEED OF ITS **UNIQUE RESOURCES**.



AS I CONSUMED KNOWLEDGE OF THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD, I SAW HOW THEY ALL SEEMED TO SERVE A SIMILAR PURPOSE FOR THE BELIEVER.

FILLING THE SPIRITUAL COMPONENT, SOME WOULD SAY.



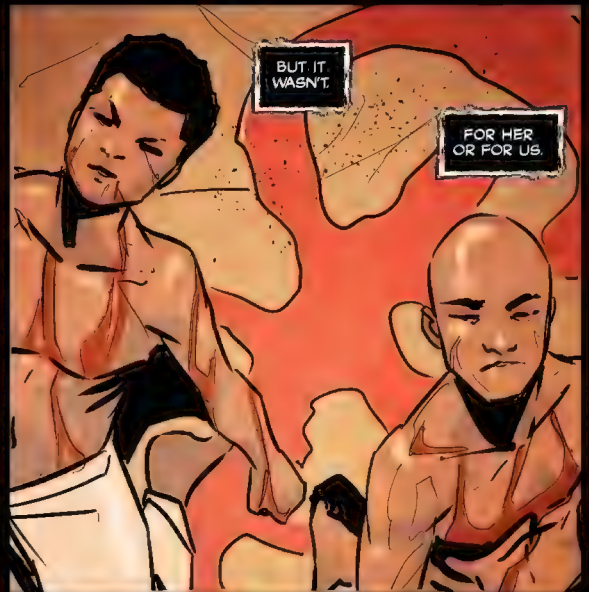
MY BROTHER AND I BELIEVED THE GODDESS SERVED THAT ROLE FOR US.

SHE WAS OUR ANSWER. SHE WAS OUR LIGHT. SHE WAS OUR PROTECTOR FROM THE DARKNESS.



AND UNLIKE THE REST OF THESE BEINGS, WHOSE POWER IS ONLY SEEN IN BOOKS, PARABLES AND APOCRYPHA, THE GODDESS SPOKE TO ME, SPOKE **THROUGH ME**.

SHE REWARDED HER BELIEVERS WITH TANGIBLE DEEDS, AND THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH.



BUT IT WASN'T.

FOR HER OR FOR US.



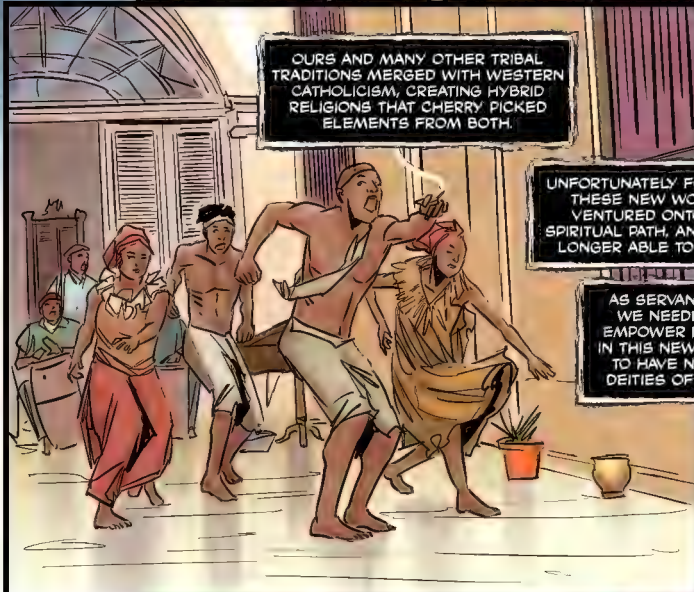
OVER TIME, WE LEARNED THAT THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OUR MOTHER HAD BROUGHT FROM AFRICA TO CUBA HAD NOT DIED WITH HER.



OURS AND MANY OTHER TRIBAL TRADITIONS MERGED WITH WESTERN CATHOLICISM, CREATING HYBRID RELIGIONS THAT CHERRY-PICKED ELEMENTS FROM BOTH.

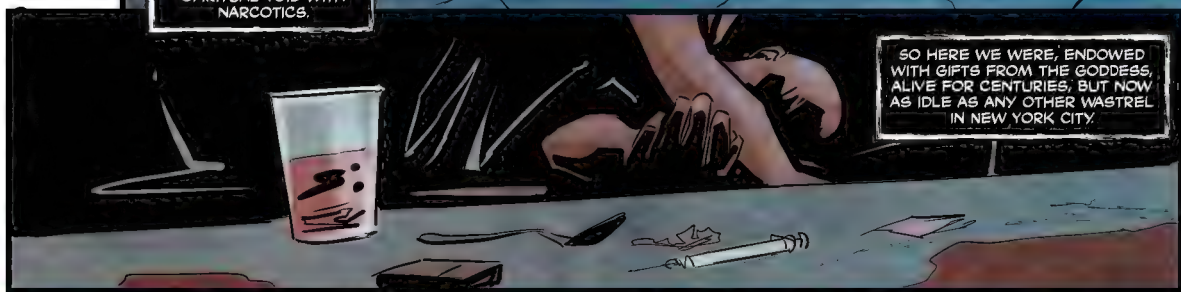
UNFORTUNATELY FOR THE GODDESS, THESE NEW WORSHIPERS HAD VENTURED ONTO A DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL PATH, AND THEY WERE NO LONGER ABLE TO EMPOWER HER.

AS SERVANTS OF THE GODDESS, WE NEEDED ANOTHER WAY TO EMPOWER HER, AND OURSELVES, IN THIS NEW WORLD THAT SEEMED TO HAVE NO PATIENCE FOR THE DEITIES OF THE OLD COUNTRIES.



MY BROTHER HAD LOST FAITH. HE STILL SOUGHT SACRIFICES FOR THE GODDESS, BUT HE NOW CONSTANTLY FILLED HIS SPIRITUAL VOID WITH NARCOTICS.

SO HERE WE WERE, ENDOWED WITH GIFTS FROM THE GODDESS, ALIVE FOR CENTURIES, BUT NOW AS IDLE AS ANY OTHER WASTREL IN NEW YORK CITY.



I NEEDED TO FIND A SOLUTION.

EVENTUALLY I WOULD REALIZE THAT THE ANSWER LAY IN THAT GARBAGE HE WAS INJECTING INTO HIS VEINS.



LOOK, THIS STORY IS HONESTLY VERY INTERESTING, BUT IS NOW THE RIGHT TIME FOR A HISTORY LESSON?



I REALLY NEED
TO GET TO THE
HOSPITAL.

AND NO OFFENSE,
BUT DO YOU THINK
ANYTHING YOU TELL ME
WILL JUSTIFY WHAT YOU
AND YOUR BROTHER
HAVE DONE?



NO,
MS. CLARKE. I
DON'T IMAGINE
IT WOULD.

I WAS JUST
HOPING TO GIVE YOU SOME
CONTEXT BEFORE--

WHAT
THE
HELL?!

SMASH





I'M SORRY TO
DO THIS, BUT YOU
MUST RESUSCITATE
MY BROTHER,
MS. CLARKE.

HM.



YOU'RE NOT THE
BEST POKER PLAYER,
ARE YOU, JACOB?

YOU KNOW
MY **JOB** IS SAVING
PEOPLE, RIGHT?



AND I NEVER NEED
TO BE COERCED... EVEN
WHEN THE VICTIM IS A
MASS MURDERER.

SO, IF YOU'LL
EXCUSE ME, I
HAVE A LIFE
TO SAVE.



FOR
MY **OWN**
REASONS!

JESUS... I WISH I WAS
REALLY AS CONFIDENT AS
I SOUNDED BACK THERE.



THE TRUTH IS, I HAVE
NO IDEA WHY I'M TRYING
TO SAVE THIS DRUG-DEALING
KILLER... LET ALONE HOW
THIS IS HAPPENING...



...BUT THIS
FEELS RIGHT.

Thoooo

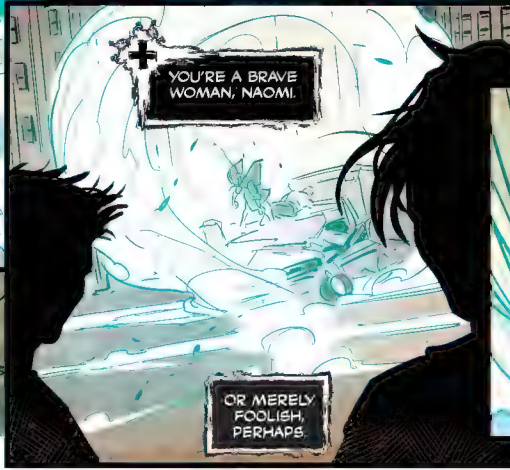


«UNGH»...
ACTUALLY...

oooooooooooooooooooo



...THIS IS
SCARY AS
HELL!



YOU'RE A BRAVE
WOMAN, NAOMI.

OR MERELY
FOOLISH,
PERHAPS.



WHERE
ARE WE?

YOU HAVEN'T
GONE ANYWHERE...

BUT WITH THE HELP OF MY
BROTHER, YOU MAY NOW PAY A VISIT
TO THE GODDESS ON *YOUR* TERMS.

WHERE
DID HE
GO?

NOT TO WORRY,
HE'S NEARBY.



BUT THE MORE
IMPORTANT QUESTION
FOR YOU, MY DEAR, IS...?

ARE YOU
READY FOR
THIS?

I AM
SO NOT
READY.

NOT LIKE
THAT HAS EVER
STOPPED ME
BEFORE.

YOU SHOULD
PROBABLY TAKE
THE STAIRCASE

SO IS YOUR VOICE
IN MY HEAD JUST
AN EXTRA BENEFIT
FROM ALL THIS?

AND, OUT OF
CURIOSITY, CAN I TURN
YOU DOWN WHEN YOU
GET **ANNOYING**?

THE GODDESS
ALLOWED ME
ACCESS TO HER
WORLD LONG AGO.

BUT HOW
DID I GET IN?

PERHAPS NOT THE BEST
TIME TO EXPLAIN THE MOLECULAR
SCIENCE INVOLVED, BUT THE DRUG
USERS YOU OBSERVED HAD
CONSUMED AN ENHANCED NARCOTIC
THAT REPLICATED THE GODDESS'
EFFECT ON HER WORSHIPERS.

SO YOU CREATED
--AND SACRIFICED--
YOUR OWN UNKNOWING
WORSHIPERS.
WONDERFUL.

ABHORRENT. I
KNOW. WE WILL PAY
FOR OUR ACTIONS.

BUT FIRST, THE
GODDESS MUST
PAY FOR HER.

HEY,
PARTNER...

...NAOMI! HEY!
I DIDN'T THINK
I'D EVER SEE
YOU AGAIN.

NAH. I'M NOT
GOING ANYWHERE.
YOU ALL RIGHT?

I MUST BE,
RIGHT? 'CAUSE
THIS DREAM PLACE
IS AWESOME!

GO BACK TO
SLEEP, MICHAEL. I'LL
SEE YOU SOON.

YOU GOT
IT, NAY NAY.

OH, GLORIA,
I'M SO SORRY
YOU GOT INVOLVED
IN ALL THIS.

I PROMISE
YOU YOU'LL BE
SAFE AND BACK
WITH YOUR
MOM SOON.

«GASP» OH,
I THOUGHT YOU WERE
THE SCARY LADY.

SHE WON'T
BOTHER YOU
AGAIN, HONEY.
I PROMISE.

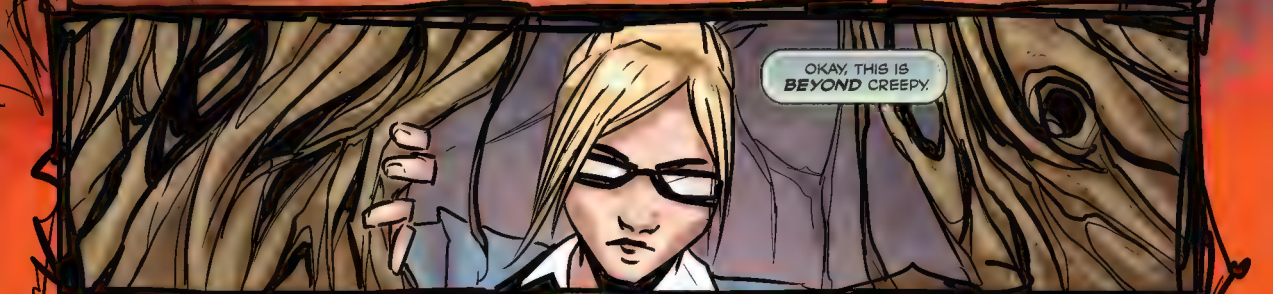
NOW JUST
REST, OKAY?

YOU'RE
MY GUARDIAN
ANGEL!



WELCOME, MY CHILDREN, AND BEAR WITNESS AS MY REIGN TRULY BEGINS.

IT IS TIME FOR CELEBRATION. DANCE, IN HONOR OF YOUR GLORIOUS QUEEN.



OKAY, THIS IS BEYOND CREEPY.



WHERE THE HELL DID THIS MISERABLE GROUP COME FROM?

OH MY GOD. THESE ARE ALL HER SACRIFICES. FROM HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO THROUGH NOW.

BUT HOW...?

AH...IT APPEARS THERE IS AN UNANNOUNCED GUEST IN OUR MIDST.

SOME OF THEM LOOK SO FAMILIAR, TOO.

INDEED, MS. CLARKE.



SHE SPURNED
OUR GIFT, AS WELL
AS OUR INVITATIONS
TO JOIN US.

YET,
HERE
SHE IS.

BE STILL,
CHILDREN.

GAZE UPON
THIS FOOLISH
LITTLE ONE.

PERHAPS IF
SHE GROVELS, WE WILL
SHOW MERCY UPON HER;
ALLOW HER A PLACE
WITHIN OUR GLORIOUS
KINGDOM.

SHE REALLY LIKES THE
SOUND OF HER OWN
VOICE, DOESN'T SHE?

I'M NOT SURE
YOU UNDERSTAND
THE GRAVITY HERE, MS.
CLARKE. IF SHE KILLS YOU
HERE, THERE WILL BE
NOTHING LEFT: YOUR
PHYSICAL LIFE, YOUR
SOUL, ALL GONE.

DAMN. WHEN YOU
PUT IT THAT WAY...

PLEASE,
YOU MUST FREE
US! SHE WILL
TORMENT US FOR
ETERNITY!

I PROMISE YOU
I WON'T LET THAT
HAPPEN TO ANY
OF YOU!

I HAVE THE WEAPONS TO
PERMANENTLY DEFEAT HER, BUT
YOU MUST KEEP HER OCCUPIED.

SILENCE!

SOMETHING TELLS
ME THAT WON'T BE
A PROBLEM...

SIRRRSSSHHHH

THIS IS NOT YOUR
WORLD, OONAA. YOU
HAVE NO PLACE
HERE!

SHE IS AS INSIGNIFICANT
AND WORTHLESS AS THE
REST OF THEM. AND NOW
SHE WILL SUFFER FOR
HER HUBRIS.

WE
COMMAND
HER...

THAKKOO
HHHSSSSSS



...TO
KNEEL!

NNNGGHHHHH!

SHE WAS PLUCKED
FROM INSIGNIFICANCE
TO BE OUR PRINCESS.
OUR HERALD TO
THIS REALM.

NOW SHE WILL
RETURN TO THE
DUST FROM WHENCE
SHE CAME.

AGGHHHH! I CAN'T TAKE
THIS. SHE'S CRUSHING ME!

SHE'S USING
THE POWER OF
ALL HER ACQUIRED
SOULS AGAINST
YOU.

BUT
YOU..



I'VE ACQUIRED ONES
OF MY OWN. THANKS
TO YOUR BROTHER.

ONES THAT ARE
UNAFFECTED BY
HER POWER.

BUT IF I SURVIVE
THIS, I WILL LEAD
YOU - ALL OF YOU -
TO A BETTER PLACE.

I
SWEAR
IT!

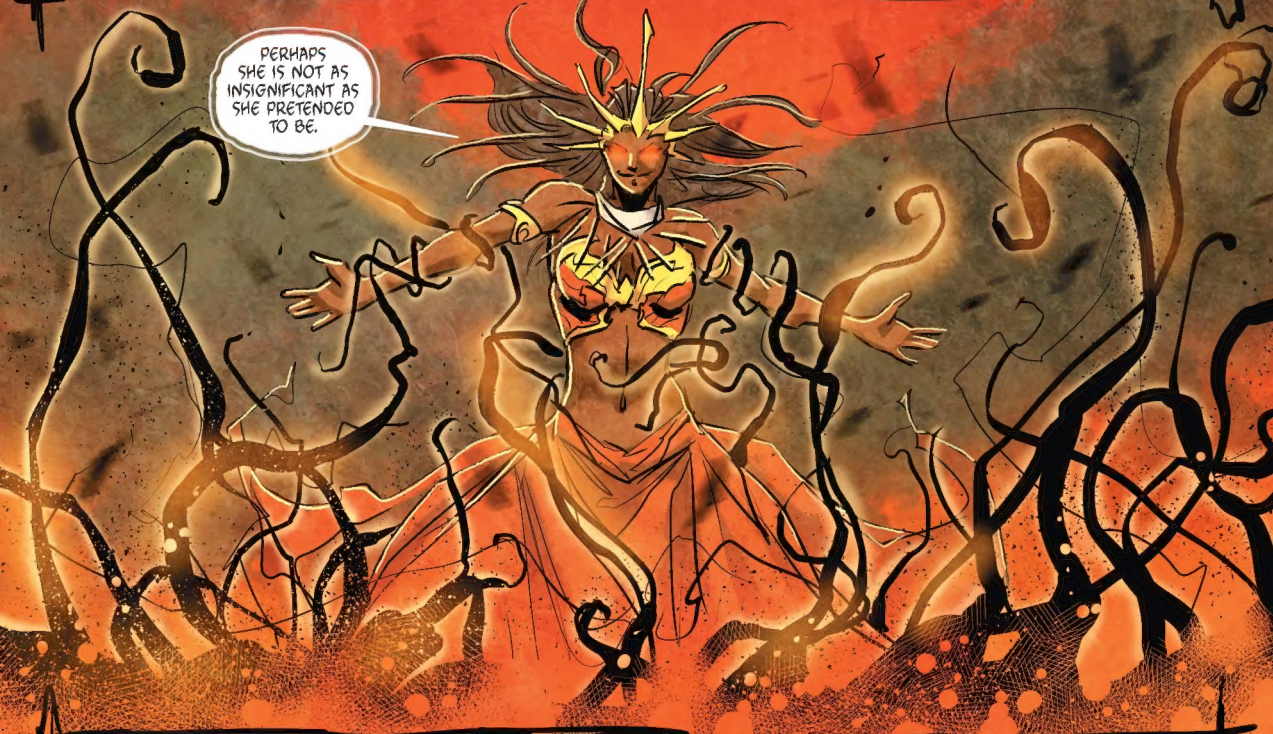
IF YOU CAN HEAR
ME, I'M SORRY TO BE
MANIPULATING YOU THIS
WAY. YOUR FATE WAS
UNDESERVED.

WHAT IS THIS? A
NEW PRESENCE?



NO!

SPRRSSSHHHH



PERHAPS
SHE IS NOT AS
INSIGNIFICANT AS
SHE PRETENDED
TO BE.



NO MATTER
SHE IS **MORTAL**,
AFTER ALL.

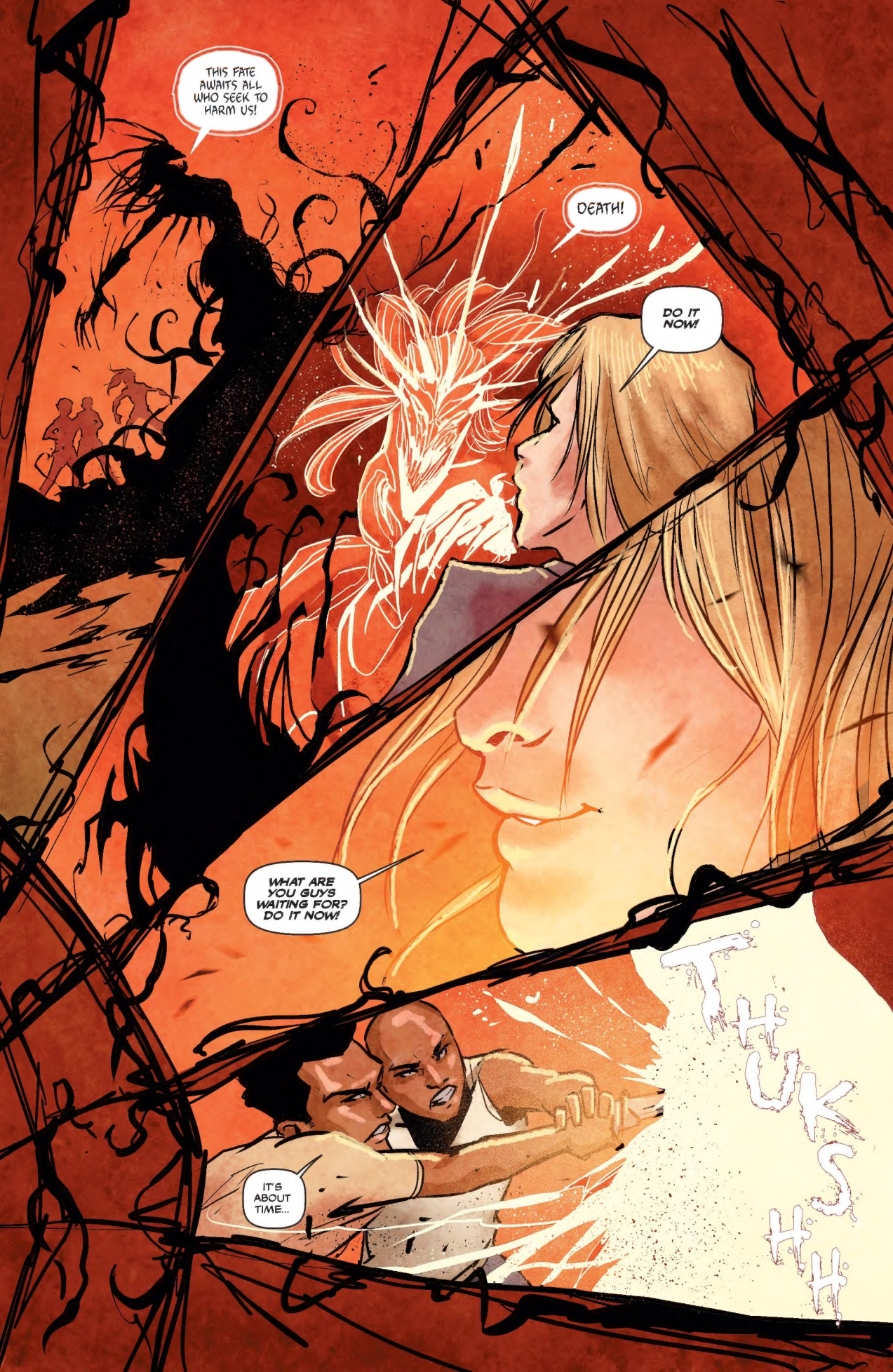
AND WE
ARE MUCH, MUCH
MORE.



ISAAC! JACOB!
HOW DID YOU
COME? WHY? GET
OUT WHILE YOU
CAN, MY SONS.

I LOVE YOU
--AND AM ECSTATIC
TO SEE YOU-- BUT
SHE WILL KILL
US ALL!

SHE HAS
ENSLAVED
US ALL LONG
ENOUGH,
MOTHER.



THIS FATE
AWAITS ALL
WHO SEEK TO
HARM US!

DEATH!

DO IT
NOW!

WHAT ARE
YOU GUYS
WAITING FOR?
DO IT NOW!

IT'S
ABOUT
TIME...

THUCKS
H.H.

YEEEEEEEEEEAAA

MY
GOD...

...IT'S
SO...

...BEAUTIFUL!

I NEVER
THOUGHT THIS
DAY WOULD
COME.

WE'RE
FREE!

WE'RE
ALL
FREE!

AGGGHHHHHHH!

WE KNOW THAT NOTHING CAN CHANGE WHAT WE'VE DONE, AND WE WILL LIKELY ENDURE ETERNAL DAMNATION FOR THE PAIN AND SUFFERING WE'VE CAUSED.

BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW, NAOMI, THAT YOUR PROMISE WAS NOT IN VAIN. WE ARE ALL FINALLY FREE TO EMBARK ONTO OUR INTENDED DESTINATIONS, GOOD OR BAD.

AND YOU WILL RETURN TO THE CORPOREAL WORLD, THOUGH I DARE SAY YOUR TRIALS ARE JUST BEGINNING...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

HEY! WELCOME BACK, KIDDO! HEARD THE DOCTOR'S PUT YOU ON SOME HEAVY \$\$\$ WHEN THEY FOUND YOU, BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU WERE HAVING **SOME DREAM!**

WAIT... WHERE'S MICHAEL? AND GLORIA?

FINE. HOME BY NOW.

SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS A WILD SCENE HERE AFTER THAT BALD GUY WE WERE AFTER. ISAAC TOOK A NOSE DIVE OUT OF YOUR PARTNER'S ROOM. GLAD SECURITY WAS ON HAND, HUH?

HAVEN'T SEEN A SIGN OF THE BODY, BUT I'M SURE IT'LL SHOW UP IN THE MORGUE ONCE THINGS CALM DOWN. ANY SIGN OF HIS BROTHER?

YEP.

NOPE. I THINK HE MIGHT'VE LEFT THE COUNTRY AND GONE INTO HIDING.

SO YOU THINK THE WORST IS OVER?

I...

...HOPE SO.

I REALLY HOPE SO.

THE END?